

Thrapston Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122111
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	314217
Inspection dates	11–12 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Linda Killman HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	5–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	487
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Weston
Headteacher	Margaret Whittington
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Market Road Thrapston Kettering NN14 4JU
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Age group	5–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large primary school for pupils of Nursery age to Year 4. Most pupils are White British and few speak languages other than English at home. While pupils come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds, very few are entitled to free school meals. When pupils start school in the Early Years Foundation Stage, their attainment is generally in line with national expectations. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The headteacher and associate headteacher lead and manage the school as a job share.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This popular and inclusive school provides good quality education and care for its pupils. Most parents appreciate all that the school provides, describing the 'caring positive environment' as 'a fantastic school where staff make an enormous effort to make learning fun'. Everyone matters here, especially the pupils. This is apparent in the warm welcome extended to new and existing families as well as visitors. Effective induction procedures help new pupils to settle into school life quickly and to feel safe and secure. Staff are approachable, recognise the uniqueness of individuals and are sensitive to their needs. Consequently, pupils enjoy trusting relationships with the adults. They flourish as confident, well-behaved, independent learners and all groups achieve well in relation to their capabilities. The school is a cohesive and harmonious community that is effective in promoting equality and diversity locally where it deservedly earns its good reputation. Nonetheless, strategic planning to broaden pupils' experiences and understanding of different cultures and lifestyles in the United Kingdom and global communities is satisfactory but limited.

The school has continued to improve since its last inspection in 2005. Good academic guidance ensures that pupils know how to improve their work. Governors are fulfilling their roles efficiently, providing an increasing level of challenge as well as support. Both headteachers provide a strong steer towards continuous improvement. Leadership and management are demonstrably effective in putting systems in place to ensure that pupils achieve well, as seen in the steadily rising standards that are above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Self-evaluation is not always rigorous enough to provide palpable evidence that new initiatives are working. There is generally strong performance across all aspects of the school's work and the leadership and management teams provide good capacity to sustain improvement.

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. The best teaching is lively and moves learning on energetically. Practical and interactive learning experiences such as group challenges and activities involving role play capture pupils' interest. They are eager to learn and are productive so they make good progress. Where teaching is less effective, there is insufficient balance between learning through listening and active participation, and some pupils lose interest. Pupils have access to computers and other technology in all lessons, which they use skilfully to support their learning.

The curriculum advances pupils' personal development and well-being to a good level and promotes creativity and healthy lifestyles. There is much for pupils to look forward to at school, from samba drumming to special themed weeks, when pupils learn to make connections between subjects. Opportunities for pupils to work together, share and negotiate are plentiful. As a result, they develop excellent social skills that complement their good skills in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) in preparation for their future lives in modern society.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The very caring ethos in both Nursery and Reception helps children to feel safe and secure. Welfare arrangements comply with requirements and staff are suitably qualified. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader is effective. She knows how young children learn best and

identifies clear targets for further improvement from regular quality checks. However, there is inconsistency in the quality of provision across the Early Years Foundation Stage. Provision in the Nursery satisfactorily covers the areas of learning but children are not always sufficiently challenged, especially in outdoor play activities. By contrast, in Reception there is a buzz of activity as children immerse themselves in spontaneous purposeful play indoors and outside. They choose from a wide range of imaginative, well-designed activities such as special challenges both indoors and outside that motivate them to learn. For example, during Transport Week, children take off on a make-believe flight in a huge model plane, act out their imaginary stories with cars, trucks and diggers or take on a mathematical challenge finding out how many plastic people will fit on a bus. Daily teaching of letter sounds (phonics) and numerous opportunities to enjoy books with an adult contribute to children's very good progress in reading. However, opportunities are missed to extend their experiences as emerging writers. Most adults provide good quality support. They encourage the children to do as much as possible for themselves but are close at hand to offer sensitive guidance or to teach them new skills should they falter. Staff assess learning and plan effectively, taking prior learning into account. Parents are valued partners in their child's learning. For example, they contribute to records of progress and many volunteer help in the classroom. Overall, children enjoy a rich experience in the Early Years Foundation Stage where they develop as happy, confident learners. Most children make good progress in all areas of learning towards the early learning goals.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve provision in the Nursery so that children are suitably challenged by the learning experiences provided, especially outside.
- Ensure that self-evaluations, especially of new approaches used in teaching, focus on the impact that provision has on learning.
- Develop the school's contribution to promoting community cohesion both in its wider region and nationally so that pupils develop a greater awareness and understanding of different cultures and lifestyles.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage to reach at least average standards in all areas of learning by time they enter Year 1. Writing remains the weaker area. The school's assessment system rightly shows that pupils make good progress through the school. In 2008, standards at the end of Year 2 were above average in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's most recent assessment information shows that pupils currently in Year 2 are set to reach similar standards overall. The 2008 performance information for Year 4 showed average standards, with standards and progress in reading being stronger than in writing and mathematics. The current Year 4 pupils are on track to reach above average standards in English and mathematics. Investigation is a strength in science. This represents good progress from the end of Year 2 and good improvement particularly in writing from the previous year. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to other pupils in the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. However, their understanding of the cultural diversity in modern Britain is not as strong as other aspects. Pupils' behaviour is consistently good in lessons and around the school and they require only occasional reminders from adults of how to conduct themselves. Adults model good social and personal skills for young children and this contributes to their demonstrably good manners and outstanding social skills. Pupils confirm that they enjoy school and their attendance is satisfactory. They know how to keep themselves safe from harm and understand the importance of healthy eating and keeping fit. Many pupils make a positive contribution to the school and local community as school council representatives, playground leaders and librarians; some are members of the community Eco-Action committee. The pupils utilise their good musical talents performing with the town band and dancing at the Thrapston Charter Fair and the annual coronation of the Rose Queen. They develop a good understanding of citizenship through participation in many charitable and fundraising events for Barnados, the British Legion and Goodwill Village, India.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching, securely planned with regard to pupils' prior learning, leads to most pupils making good progress. Most teachers plan activities with pupils' abilities and interests in mind so that motivation is high and learning is purposeful. They use a wide range of approaches that retain a fresh edge to learning throughout the lesson. However, in some lessons, teachers overly direct the learning with too much teacher talk and too little activity. As a result, some pupils begin to lose interest and do not make the progress of which they are capable. Teachers use the electronic whiteboards very effectively to reinforce the main teaching points. Prompts and useful tips on display in the classrooms also support learning. All pupils receive regular verbal feedback during lessons that guides them towards achieving the learning objective. The quality of support from teaching assistants for pupils who need additional help is variable. All staff are accountable for pupils' achievement and diligently work towards improving their practice and meeting challenging targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets all statutory requirements and contributes well to pupils' good achievement, including for pupils with additional learning needs and those with special gifts and talents. It is also very successful in promoting pupils' personal, social and health needs. Pupils' enjoyment is greatly enhanced by the practical nature of the curriculum, for example in making clothes from waste materials. Pupils use ICT skilfully in many subjects and this increases their motivation and progress. Art and design and music are strong features with plentiful opportunities for pupils to apply their creative skills across the curriculum. Pupils' eco awareness is being successfully developed in lessons and through the work of the ECO Action team. Take-up for the many clubs that run during the week is high. Visits and visitors enrich the curriculum and extend pupils' experiences. Pupils benefit from access to good resources such as a first-class range of books that contributes to their enjoyment of reading and reinforces

a passion for books. Adaptations made to improve writing have been very successful, leading to rising standards. However, pupils' writing at length in other subjects is not fully developed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All aspects of health and safety, safeguarding and child protection arrangements meet current government requirements. Pupils learn how to stay safe using the internet, and external professionals such as the school nurse and the fire brigade talk to the children about specific areas of health and safety. Older pupils have a good understanding of the wider implications of smoking and drinking. Incidents of bullying are extremely rare but they are dealt with promptly and effectively. Pupils confirm that teachers encourage them to aim high in reaching their targets and direct them towards improvement. The school's good systems for tracking progress alerts staff to pupils whose learning has faltered and this triggers intervention to get them back on track. Staff include parents in designing individual learning programmes for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils for whom English is an additional language receive excellent individual support and parents praise the school for helping their children make good progress. Regular marking of pupils' writing provides pupils with clear guidance about the steps needed to improve. This good quality advice is not evident in some other subjects and is weakest in mathematics.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school's leadership and management teams demonstrate commitment and resolve for pupils' to achieve well academically, socially and emotionally. On a daily basis, the school operates like a well-oiled machine because systems are robust and consistently applied. The headteacher and associate headteacher have created a common sense of purpose amongst staff who are willing to 'go the extra mile' to continuously improve their performance, for example in undertaking training or by sharing good practice. The leadership team, governors and subject leaders contribute to the school's planning for development. Actions are well chosen but timescales for completion and the criteria for measuring success lack precision. Resources are well used, including external agencies to improve outcomes for learners and to achieve good value for money. Parents are strongly supportive of the school. Governance is good and has improved since the last inspection. Governors are knowledgeable of the work of the school and are confident in making tough decisions in the pupils' best interests. This is a school where the leadership and management teams are successful in sustaining improvement and ensure that the school continues to move in the right direction.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

13 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thrapston Primary School, Thrapston, NN14 4JU

You may remember that recently, three inspectors came to your school to see how well you are learning. We enjoyed talking to you and watching you at work and at play. We were extremely impressed by your excellent manners and politeness and we would like to say a huge thank-you for being so friendly and telling us all about your school. Yours is a good school and this is why.

- You behave very well in lessons and when playing outside. You treat one another kindly and think carefully about how you should treat one another.
- You know how to stay safe and be healthy.
- Your teachers do a good job making sure that you learn as much as you can as fast as you are able. They check to make sure that you are reaching your targets.
- You and your parents say that you enjoy school. We agree because there is always so much to look forward to such as Pirate or Transport Weeks. Most of your lessons are very enjoyable and this helps you to learn well.
- By the time you leave the school, most of you are reaching higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics than other pupils of the same age in England.

To make the school even better we have asked the staff and governors to do the following:

- give the Nursery children more interesting activities to choose from, especially when they play outside
- help you to learn more about people from different backgrounds and cultures who live in other parts of the United Kingdom and abroad
- check that new ways of working are helping you to learn better.

Rightly, you and your parents think highly of your school. We know that you are happy, confident learners and we hope that you will always enjoy school as much as you do now.

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman

Her Majesty's Inspector