

Thropton Village First School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 122229 |
| Local Authority | Northumberland |
| Inspection number | 314241 |
| Inspection dates | 27–28 September 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Graeme Clarke |

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

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| Type of school | First |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 3–9 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 55 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Dorothy Anderson |
| Headteacher | Mrs Susan McLean |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 December 2003 |
| School address | Thropton Morpeth Northumberland NE65 7JD |
| Telephone number | 01669 620297 |
| Fax number | 01669 621235 |

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|--------------------------|----------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small rural school serves part of the wide area of upper Coquetdale, a locality where socio-economic characteristics are broadly average. All pupils are from a White British heritage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. An above average number have learning difficulties and/or disabilities although relatively few pupils have statements of special educational need.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Thropton First School provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Since the time of the previous inspection, the new headteacher has revitalised the school. Her effective leadership, good governance, and the strong team spirit and commitment from staff very successfully promote a philosophy that every child does matter and each should do as well as they can. In their plan for improvement, the headteacher and governors rightly share a top priority of raising standards in literacy and numeracy, and a commendable desire to develop the skills and expertise of their young teachers. By giving attention to improving the effectiveness of the new teaching and support team, standards are rising. The school successfully strives to get the best from its resources. It gives good value for money and has a good capacity to improve.

An overwhelming majority of parents are delighted with the school and have confidence in it. A very small minority are dissatisfied with changes to the start of the school day but most find them entirely reasonable. Many said that their children enjoy school and feel safe. They are pleased about the good quality of care provided. One parent's comment sums up their views, 'We are extremely pleased in the way [our son] has progressed at Thropton. ...teachers are friendly and approachable. Thropton provides a safe, stimulating environment for children to grow.'

Overall the teaching is satisfactory, with many aspects that are of good quality. Under the headteacher's skilful direction, the relatively new teaching team enthusiastically share expectations with pupils and tell them how well they are learning. Teachers' personal knowledge of each child is clearly and successfully used to help those at risk of falling behind. These approaches lead to those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities making good progress, and the high achievement of gifted and talented pupils. For other pupils, however, targets are not sufficiently challenging to inspire them to aim for higher levels of attainment and they are not always clear about how to improve their work. Nevertheless, overall achievement is satisfactory. Standards in Year 2 vary considerably with the small size and differing ability of each year group but are broadly average. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 make satisfactory progress. Their standards are in line with the level expected for pupils of this age, although literacy is not as high as mathematics.

Excellent partnerships, including very effective links with the local authority and schools, enhance support for all pupils. The good curriculum is enriched with many visits and visitors which make learning more enjoyable for pupils.

The school successfully prepares pupils to be good citizens and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effective. They are polite, considerate, and well-behaved. Pupils know how to stay safe and have a good awareness of health and fitness. They enjoy school and many take part in after-school activities and use playground equipment for exercise. Many make an exceptional contribution through the school council and are good ambassadors in their charitable work with the local and wider communities. Their strong grasp of enterprise and sound basic skills, together with good liaison with the middle school, prepare them well for their future.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children begin in the Foundation Stage, in the Nursery, with abilities that are broadly typical for children of this age, but a little below average for speaking and communication skills.

Well-planned activities and more effective teaching has improved learning year on year as recommendations from the National Strategy have been implemented. Children are helped to learn well through very good first-hand experiences, both in-and out-of-doors. In turn, children make good progress, which helps them become confident and show interest in what they do. This year all children leaving the Foundation Stage to join Year 1 reached all the nationally agreed early learning goals and some did even better in developing their communication skills. Parents are pleased with the way their children settle into the Nursery.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards and achievement in Years 3 and 4, especially in literacy.
- Use assessment information to enable teachers to set targets, plan challenging learning activities for all pupils, and help pupils know the next steps they have to take to improve their attainment.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory and standards by the end of Year 4 are in line with what is expected for this age.

Progress through the Foundation Stage is good especially in improving communication skills. Children reach the standards expected for their age by the time they start in Year 1. Most pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2 and reach the standard expected for their age. Teachers' assessments have shown a downward trend of results in recent years but early indications are of an improved picture in 2007. The small number of pupils involved means general conclusions cannot be made about the relative attainments of boy and girls.

Pupils' progress through Years 3 and 4 is also satisfactory. By the end of Year 4 standards in reading, writing and mathematics are broadly in line with what is expected for this age and this continues the pattern of recent years. Pupils' progress in reading and writing is much as expected but is not as good as in mathematics. As a result of the effective support they receive, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities made good progress in reading, and gifted and talented pupils made exceptional progress in reading and mathematics. Evidence from pupils' books inspected, and from their work in lessons observed confirms at this early stage in the school year that achievement is satisfactory and standards are broadly average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and the school ensures that their overall personal development and well-being are also good. Pupils reflect conscientiously on issues of care and consideration for others, behave well and are polite and confident as they go about their work. They happily take part in the many different activities available to them and their enthusiasm in lessons shows how much they enjoy school. Attendance is average, mainly because of holidays taken by a few in term time. Pupils know how to keep safe and healthy. They enjoy a healthy lunch, either from the school canteen or brought from home. Many willingly take part in physical activities, such as in the morning 'wake and shake' sessions,

in visits to outdoor activities centres, and in the after-school clubs. Pupils help the school's contribution to the local community. They raise money for charity, sing for residents of the local RAF benevolent home, and take part in the village agricultural show. They contribute to their own community for example, by promoting safe behaviour through the buddy system which makes sure pupils are befriended when needed. They see the school council as playing an important part in helping improve the school and have a clear idea of what it is to be a good citizen. Pupils' sound basic skills and their good experience of working in teams prepare them well for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

After a period of instability in the staff, several aspects of the quality of teaching provided by the recently established teaching team are good or outstanding and are primarily responsible for the upturn in pupils' achievement. Overall teaching and, particularly, learning are satisfactory. Lessons are planned well so that the work suits pupils' different abilities. Teachers help pupils by sharing learning goals at the start so they know what they will be learning. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together and foster a good rapport with pupils which, with the activities they provide, captures pupils' interest so they are attentive and willingly contribute when asked. Effective support for pupils with learning difficulties or particular needs helps them to make good progress. However, teachers' expectations of presentation and achievement are not yet as high as they could be and this accounts for the only satisfactory progress that most pupils make. Pupils know how well they are doing, and receive praise for their success, but marking offers them little help towards the next steps in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A well-designed programme of National Curriculum subjects and personal, social and health education, evident in all facets of school life, enables pupils to become enthusiastic learners. Educational outings, such as to outdoor centres, the theatre, art galleries and museums, and Alnwick Castle make a big contribution to their social and cultural development. Visitors add to pupils' personal development and well-being by, for example, increasing their safety awareness and physical skills. Of particular note is pupils' work with a visiting artist to create ceramic tiles, now installed in their refurbished toilets. Many pupils participate in after-school activities, including sport, music, and gardening, which further enrich their experience.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The atmosphere in the school is one of welcome, care and purpose, and stems from the outstanding way staff are concerned for the welfare of their pupils. In many ways this pastoral care leads to the good personal development and well-being of all pupils. Procedures to safeguard children with routines for child protection and health and safety are fully in place and thorough. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive effective support which helps them make good progress. Good arrangements for pupils' emotional support work well. Excellent links with outside agencies and parents are very successful. Very good procedures ensure children settle quickly into school, and that they are well-prepared for a smooth transition

to middle school. The school diligently and rigorously collects information about pupils' attainments and progress twice yearly to track their overall progress and to set pupils targets. However, targets are not always as challenging as they could be, and the school recognises the next step is for teachers to use the information more fully to help pupils reach higher standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management throughout the school play a crucial part in promoting the positive climate for learning that all pupils thrive in and enjoy. This is an outstandingly inclusive school seen in all it does to promote the principles of 'Every Child Matters', both in relation to personal development, and in achievement. Governance is good. The headteacher and governors work harmoniously together to ensure the school is well-led and managed. They do much to ensure the effectiveness of their new, young teaching and support staff through performance management, up-to-date training and support. They have successfully addressed all issues from the last inspection and work with determination to raise standards higher. Resources are used well and standards are rising. Their effectiveness can be seen in their prompt response to the dip in the results in Year 2 in 2006 and the great improvement made in 2007. The headteacher and governors diligently monitor all aspects of school life. The school's self-evaluation is broadly accurate, and has led to a well thought out development plan with appropriate priorities and strategies to raise standards further.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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|---|-----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 3 |
| 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? | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 3 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 3 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 2 |

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| How good is 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 |
| How well 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 the learners' needs? | 3 |
| 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 |

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A**Leadership and management**

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| 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 | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 1 |
| 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**

1 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thropton Village First School, Northumberland, NE65 7JD.

I really enjoyed my visit to your school. Thank you for helping me when I came into your classrooms and assembly to see you at work. You were exceptionally polite and really helpful. I did enjoy talking to you. I was especially impressed with those I met from the school council. It was great to see how much you enjoy coming to school and how you contribute to school life. I know the headteacher and the staff are all very proud of you.

Your school has a very warm and welcoming atmosphere and is well organised. I'm pleased that you feel safe and happy because all the adults in the school look after you very well. Many of your lessons are good. I was impressed with the way you work hard and like to take part. I like the way your teachers often share what you are going to do in lessons. Those of you now in Year 3 did well in the assessments last summer.

I have suggested that staff and governors should:

- help you to improve your work even further in reading and writing
- set you targets that will help you rise to the challenge and let you know what you have to do to improve when your work is marked.

You have very many opportunities at Thropton First School to learn about life and these should stand you in good stead for the future. I hope that you all do really well.

Yours sincerely

Graeme Clarke

Lead Inspector