

Thursfield Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124086
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314800
Inspection dates	19–20 November 2007
Reporting inspector	David Driscoll

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	265
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rob Mack
Headteacher	Loretta Frain
Date of previous school inspection	20 May 2005
School address	Chapel Lane Harriseahead Stoke-on-Trent ST7 4JL
Telephone number	01782 512301
Fax number	01782 510590

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Thursfield is a larger than average primary school that serves an area to the north of Kidsgrove. There are very few pupils from a minority ethnic background at the school. A new headteacher joined the school at the beginning of September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Thursfield provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Children join with standards that are similar to the national average. They get off to a good start in the Reception Year and make good progress so that they are well prepared for the next stage in their learning. This is successfully built on in Years 1 and 2 so that standards by the end of Year 2 are above average. The key reason for pupils doing so well in these year groups is that teachers set tasks that are just right for pupils' differing abilities. In Years 3 and 4, the rate of learning slows because the work is often too easy for the most able or too hard for the least able but pupils still display good attitudes to their work. Progress picks up again in Years 5 and 6 so that by the end of Year 6, standards are still above average, however more could be expected given the good base at the start of Year 3. Nevertheless, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Pupils feel safe and happy at school because they are cared for well. They enjoy their lessons, partly because they get lots of opportunities to work on their own or in small groups, which helps them develop their good levels of independence. Pupils know a lot about people from a range of backgrounds, because the school works hard to give them experiences of other countries and of different cultures represented in Britain.

The school has made satisfactory progress since it was last inspected. However, information about pupils' progress has not been analysed in sufficient detail to allow the school's managers, including governors, to arrive at an accurate view of the school's performance. As a result their view of its effectiveness has been over generous, and underachievement has not been identified early enough for actions to be taken. Checks on teaching have pointed out the strengths, but have not identified exactly where improvements needed to be made. As a result, teachers have not had a clear view of how their teaching might be improved. The new headteacher has quickly established a more accurate view of the school's main strengths and weaknesses, and plans are in place to improve pupils' progress.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage provides the children with a good grounding on which to build their skills. Children make good progress and by the end of the Reception Year the majority are achieving expected levels in all areas and many are exceeding these. This is because teaching is good and children are motivated to learn, enjoying the challenges offered. Children's personal development is good and they quickly settle into the routines of school life. Relationships within the classrooms between teachers and children are very good. Consequently, children behave well and begin to share and help each other. Planning is closely related to national guidance and covers all areas of learning. The downside is the lack of a secure accessible outdoor area where children can move freely and use the equipment as an extension of the classroom. This means they do not receive the full range of experiences usually enjoyed by young children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve progress in Years 3 and 4 by ensuring that the work given to pupils is better matched to their abilities.
- Improve the use of data to identify underachievement at an earlier stage, and take action to rectify any causes from this.

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers are made aware of exactly what they could do to improve their lessons.

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

Children make good progress through Reception and in Years 1 and 2, so they start Year 3 with standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are above average. Progress from Year 3 to Year 6 is satisfactory, but there are significant differences between the years. The rate of progress slows in Years 3 and 4, so pupils do not make the gains they should. Progress in Years 5 and 6 is good, but not enough to fully make up for the deficiencies of Years 3 and 4, so achievement from Year 3 to 6 is only satisfactory. Standards in English, mathematics and science are above average at the end of Year 6 and pupils' achievement overall is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy being in school and have a positive attitude towards their work. Pupils work harmoniously together because they are expected to show respect for each other. Pupils make a good contribution to both the school and the local community, for example by inviting elderly residents to their harvest celebrations. There are many opportunities for pupils to develop social responsibilities such as looking after younger pupils at break times or being members of the school council. Pupils are proud of the way they can influence the life of the school. As one said, 'It's an honour to be a school councillor.'

Although pupils talk confidently about healthy eating, they do not put their knowledge into practice. There are far too many chocolates and crisps eaten at breaktime. Pupils are, however, very aware of the need for regular exercise and understand how to stay safe by, for example, saying 'no' to strangers.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Throughout the school, teachers ensure that pupils know what it is they are expected to learn in their lessons. Instructions are always clear, so pupils understand what they have to do and can get straight down to work. Teachers in Reception and in Years 1 and 2 use their understanding of what pupils have already learned to set work that is well matched to their needs. The more able pupils are given work that really makes them think hard, while the less able are given extra support to help them with slightly easier tasks. The same approach is not used in Years 3 and 4, where too often pupils are all given the same tasks, regardless of their ability. The more able tend to find the work too easy, while the least able simply give up. Teachers have higher expectations in Years 5 and 6 and the pace of lessons is faster so pupils make good progress. However, even in these years, the work is not always well matched to the pupils' needs.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Good planning in the Foundation Stage ensures that children's learning needs are effectively met. In all years, the curriculum is planned to provide good opportunities for pupils to carry out work on their own, especially using computers, which helps to develop their independence. The plans do not, however, make clear what work should be given to pupils of differing ability. This is particularly the case where pupils in Years 3 to 6 are taught in sets based on their skills and knowledge in English and mathematics. While this reduces the range of abilities, there is still a variation but this is not taken into account and all pupils in a set are given the same tasks. A strength of the curriculum is the way pupils are provided with many opportunities to develop personal skills through visits and links with local organisations. For example, links with Crewe Alexander Football Club promote pupils' self-confidence and improve their physical skills. The arrangements for pupils to transfer to the next stage of learning are good, so that the transition is smooth. Good opportunities are provided to learn about a range of cultures, either through meeting visitors from different ethnic backgrounds or through initiatives such as the 'multicultural week' and the Japan project in Years 1 and 2. Everyone in Years 1 and 2 can say hello and answer the register in Japanese!

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This is a caring school which provides its pupils with a secure, attractive and safe environment in which to work. Because the staff know them well, pupils feel safe and are confident they can approach any adult if a problem arises. Child protection, health and safety and risk assessment procedures are securely in place. All staff have received appropriate training, and many are also trained to respond to specific medical emergencies.

The systems for providing academic guidance are good. All pupils have targets to aim for, which change on a termly basis. The targets are known well by the pupils and are helpful in improving specific aspects of their literacy and numeracy. The school plans to combine this system for setting targets with the way it checks pupils' progress to provide more frequent assessments that will allow any emerging underachievement to be dealt with more quickly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Parents are happy with the school and pleased with the changes made by the new headteacher. However, a high proportion rightly feel that their views are not sought often enough. The school has improved steadily since the school was last inspected, because all staff work well as a team. However, the school's managers, including governors, have tended to compare the school's performance with other local schools, rather than schools nationally. This has led to an over generous evaluation of achievement which in turn means that some of the school's priorities have not been focused well enough on the most important areas for improvement. In particular, managers have not used the school's own data on pupils' progress to identify any areas of underachievement. The targets set for pupils' performance in national tests are reasonable, but not challenging. The new headteacher has made a good start in accurately identifying the school's main strengths and weaknesses.

Plans are currently being drawn up to address the weaknesses, which clearly demonstrate that the school's managers have the skills necessary to improve it further.

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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?	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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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	3

Personal development and well-being

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	3
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?	3
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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thursfield Primary School, Harriseahead, Stoke on Trent ST7 4JL

Thank you for talking to us and helping us when we visited your school. You told us a lot about your life at school, and why you like coming each day. You work hard and get on well with one another. You get lots of chances to work on your own or in pairs, so you learn how to get on by yourselves.

We found that you are getting a satisfactory education. You settle quickly into school life and do well in your first few years, and learn a lot. This is because the teachers know what you need to improve and give you work that helps you learn quickly. After that though, some of you told us that you find the work a bit too easy or hard, and we agree. So we have asked the teachers to make sure they give you work that makes you think but also makes sure that you succeed. The people who run the school had not spotted that some of you were falling behind, so we have asked them to keep a closer eye on how well you are doing. We have also asked them to look at your lessons more closely so they can find out what will make them even better. This will allow them to make sure you quickly catch up again. In Years 5 and 6, you make good progress and so you leave the school with standards that are above average.

We were impressed by how much you know about how people live in other parts of Britain and in the wider world.

You told us that you feel safe at school, and you are right when you say that your teachers look after you well. You know how to keep yourselves safe too. You understand about healthy food, but you eat an awful lot of chocolate and crisps at break. So, come on, do what you know is right and ask your parents and carers to give you some fruit instead.

With all best wishes for the future.

David Driscoll Lead inspector

21 November 2007

Dear Pupils

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ST7 4JL**

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David Driscoll
Lead inspector