

Thakeham First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125856
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	315331
Inspection date	10 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Janet Sinclair

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–10
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	79
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Simon Powlson
Headteacher	Sue King
Date of previous school inspection	7 April 2003
School address	The Street Thakeham Pulborough RH20 3EP
Telephone number	01798 812133
Fax number	01798 815121

Age group	3–10
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Children join this smaller than average first school with attainment that is mainly above that expected for four-year-olds. Most pupils are of White British origin with a small number from other backgrounds. The current headteacher has only been in post for two years and took over from a long-established headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Thakeham is a good school. The headteacher and staff have created a good learning environment where pupils work hard and are keen to do well. All staff cater well for pupils' academic and personal development and provide an outstanding range of additional activities to enrich the good curriculum. Consequently, pupils achieve well to reach standards that are well above average.

Pupils' good progress is due to good teaching. Most lessons are clearly planned and contain stimulating activities. Teachers have good subject knowledge which ensures pupils are keen and motivated to learn. However, marking rarely tells pupils what needs to be done to improve further. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning are also a key factor in their good achievement and pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils behave well and thoroughly enjoy school, especially those who are school councillors who want 'to improve the school'.

Provision in the Foundation Stage is a relative weakness and is satisfactory. Most children make satisfactory progress across the areas of learning in their first year at school so that many reach or exceed the expected levels by the start of Year 1. However, in writing, some lower attaining children do not make enough progress due to a lack of opportunity to write independently. Teaching is satisfactory in this year group with orderly routines being established and good relationships in place. The curriculum is satisfactory, but with limited planning for children's independent activity.

Care, guidance and support are consistently good. There are good procedures to ensure pupils' health, safety and welfare. Pupils' attainment is assessed regularly with individual targets set for English and mathematics as a result. Most parents support the school with enthusiasm and appreciate the calm and purposeful atmosphere, as shown by comments such as 'my son is very happy and progressing well'. However, a significant minority have some concerns, particularly regarding the movement of teachers to different classes from September 2007. This would have benefited from a clearer explanation and rationale by the school.

Leadership and management are good overall, setting clear direction for the school through a detailed school improvement plan and clear actions which are bringing about further improvements to the school. There have been good improvements in information and communication technology (ICT) resources, subject leadership and individual targets for pupils since the last inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure marking tells pupils what they need to do to improve their work.
- Improve provision in the Foundation Stage so that planning for independent activities is clearly identified and opportunities for writing enable lower attaining children to make better progress.
- Improve communication with parents so that they are clear about the educational reasons for changes.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well to reach standards that are well above average. Children start school with attainment that is wide ranging but above the levels expected for their age overall. In the

Foundation Stage, they make mainly satisfactory progress across the areas of learning. However, progress in writing is slow for lower attaining children as their writing experiences are limited. Pupils make good progress to achieve well above average standards by the end of Year 2 and this has been sustained in national tests over several years. Pupils of all abilities continue to make good progress in Years 3 to 5. Writing, the weakest area over time, is showing a good improvement as a result of the huge emphasis the school has placed on it. In the work seen, there was good evidence of well written work and a good standard of spelling. Recent progress in writing in Year 5 is particularly good. Through their strong support for reading, parents make a good contribution to reading standards. The school identified some issues with boys' achievement and is working hard to bring about improvement through more boy-friendly provision, but it is too early to clearly show results. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress due to the very thorough provision made for them. The good standards attained in core literacy and numeracy skills prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and have positive attitudes to learning. Behaviour is consistently good due to the school's high expectations and the good relationships between all members of the school community. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The strong emphasis on pupils' moral and social development enables them to develop a sensitive approach to school life and everyday issues, and to appreciate the effort of others. Pupils consider this to be a good school where they feel safe and generally free from problems such as bullying, which is reflected in their above average attendance. Independent learning is encouraged across the school, but not sufficiently so in the Foundation Stage.

Pupils say they feel their 'views are listened to' through the well established, lively and highly effective school council. They contribute well to the school and wider community through, for example, regular 'table top' sales which they organise to raise money to sponsor children in India and a 'Village Day' to raise funds for the school.

Pupils have a good awareness of the importance of safety, have a clear understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and enjoy a good amount of exercise, including games at play time, a 'Health and Fitness' week and a skipping workshop.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall, with a good contribution from part-time teachers, such as the enrichment and music teachers, and the good number of teaching assistants. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Relationships here are good and routines well established but limited opportunities for independent writing for lower attaining children and lack of detailed planning for some activities inhibit progress.

Across the rest of the school, lessons are well planned and organised, and proceed at a good pace. They include stimulating activities, such as in a Year 4/5 English lesson that used drama to explore relationships between characters in a story. Good relationships and teachers' good subject knowledge engages pupils and encourages them to work independently.

Assessment is used well to ensure work is well matched to pupils' needs and pupils themselves are becoming increasingly involved in assessing their own learning through 'thumbs up or down' signals to indicate their level of understanding. Marking of pupils' work, although satisfactory, rarely indicates to pupils what needs to be done to improve further.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are taught well and receive very good provision for their individual needs from the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO).

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and balanced and significantly enhanced by a wide range of visits and visitors throughout the school year. The creative aspects of the curriculum are particularly strong, with some excellent art and project work throughout the school. Following a recent initiative to enrich the curriculum, the advanced skills teacher has been highly effective in promoting cross-curricular planning throughout the school. The Foundation Stage curriculum is appropriately planned to cover all areas of learning but does not provide sufficiently structured planning for child-initiated activity. The personal, social and health education programme contributes well to pupils' personal development and successfully raises awareness of healthy, safe lifestyles. Since the last inspection, resources for ICT have been greatly improved and now effectively support learning in subjects across the curriculum.

Pupils participate in an outstanding range of after school activities, such as gymnastics, power chi, art and pottery, as well as a range of sporting activities.

There are very good links with other schools in the community ensuring a smooth transition and participation in a wide range of shared activities, such as the concerts currently taking place.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This is an especially caring school where pupils' personal and academic needs are given a high priority. Secure systems are in place to monitor pupils' safety, well-being and progress. Child protection procedures are good and well understood throughout the school community. Rigorous risk assessments are made before pupils go on a wide range of visits. Parents are confident that their children are safe and well cared for in school and pupils themselves feel safe and well supported.

Pupils' attainment is assessed regularly. This assessment is particularly good in writing where work is regularly levelled and the next steps in pupils' learning identified. An improvement since the last inspection is the setting of individual targets for pupils, especially in English and mathematics. Most pupils are aware of their targets and use them effectively to focus on their next piece of work. However, marking is not used well as part of this guidance. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given effective support and guidance, including good use of external agencies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides good leadership with a strong emphasis on helping pupils to be excited by their learning and have full involvement as active participants. Subject leaders are developing their roles well and have been given good support in order to extend their expertise through attendance at courses, in-service training, local authority guidance and action plans for their subjects. Provision is further enhanced through specialist leadership such as the SENCO, music teacher and enrichment teacher.

The school improvement plan is clear and details provision and actions to help the school move forward successfully. Effective monitoring of teaching has identified some of the areas for improvement and led to more support for staff. This has included a change of year groups for staff who have spent many years in the same class. Rigorous self-evaluation is built into all aspects of the school's work as it strives for further improvements to the curriculum, especially in the Foundation Stage, and greater involvement of pupils in their learning. The impact is already being seen in improved standards in writing. This demonstrates the school's good capacity to improve further.

Governors make a good contribution to the work of the school. They are clear about their responsibilities, work well as a critical friend to the school and ensure they are well informed.

Although many parents are happy with the work of the school, a significant minority have concerns, particularly about the proposed class teacher changes. Written communication on this subject, although regular and detailed, has failed to clearly explain to parents the educational justification for the change in classes.

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

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

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 disabilities make progress	2

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 behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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?	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

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?	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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

11 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thakeham First School Thakeham, West Sussex, RH20 3EP.

I am writing to let you know how much we enjoyed our visit to your school. Thank you for being so friendly and helping us with the inspection. We could see how much you enjoy school, particularly the opportunity to be school councillors enabling you to have a say in what happens in the school.

We think that Thakeham First School is a good school.

Here are the things we like about your school:

- Your headteacher and the other staff run the school well, take good care of you and make sure you have a good education.
- You behave well, work hard and are keen to learn.
- You make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics and do much better than other children of your age.
- You thoroughly enjoy school and are keen to take on responsibilities to improve the school and help children less fortunate than yourselves.
- You enjoy the excellent range of clubs and other activities the school offers.
- You use projects well to learn about the world.
- Your teachers make your lessons interesting.

Here are the things we think the school could do better:

- We know your teachers mark your work and are very encouraging, but they also need to tell you how you can improve your work.
- Some children in Reception need more help with writing and some of the activities are not planned well enough to ensure they make good progress.
- Your school is making many positive changes but it does not always clearly explain the reasons for the changes to your parents and carers.

You can help by continuing to work hard and doing your best. Thank you once again for your friendliness when we inspected your school.

Yours sincerely

Janet Sinclair Lead Inspector