

Thornhill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132117
Local Authority	Southampton
Inspection number	315923
Inspection dates	17–18 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Mike Dukes

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	261
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms S Mihelic
Headteacher	Miss J Greethurst
Date of previous school inspection	16 June 2003
School address	Byron Road Thornhill Southampton SO19 6FH
Telephone number	023 8044 9595
Fax number	023 8042 0384

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is situated on the Thornhill Estate at the Eastern side of Southampton. It is larger than most primary schools and currently has fewer girls than boys. The area includes mainly social housing. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well over twice the national average. The school receives additional funding under the government programme 'New Deal for Communities' to tackle multiple deprivation. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is more than double the average. There is a higher proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need than is usually found because the school has special provision for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. There is a high level of mobility caused by significant numbers of pupils joining or leaving the school other than at the usual times.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Thornhill Primary is a good school. The exceptional drive and commitment of the headteacher, well supported by her assistant headteachers, has led to good improvements in the school since its last inspection and the pupils benefit from working within a caring climate. The curriculum now provides a good range of learning experiences and, over recent years, the teaching has improved. As a result, pupils make good progress in English, mathematics and science although this is not consistent for all groups, reflecting some variations in the quality of teaching. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities do well, and those in the unit for those with moderate learning difficulties in language and communication achieve exceptionally well. However, more able pupils in some lessons do not do as well as they should because their work is not always sufficiently challenging. From very low starting points, pupils benefit from the good provision in the Foundation Stage and they make good progress to the end of Year 2. Standards at the end of Year 6 have improved in recent years and are in line with those expected. Although the teaching has improved and is good overall, there remain some inconsistencies. In addition, teachers are not always doing enough to ensure that pupils understand their learning targets, although pupils are generally guided well in their learning.

Leadership is good and the staff give high priority to the care and personal development of pupils. They have focused on meeting the needs of the high numbers of vulnerable pupils by using specialist staff who improve the pupils' emotional development and confidence through very effective nurture work. As a result, pastoral care is outstanding and pupils are well protected from harm. Parents appreciate this feature of the school. As one said, 'Staff are approachable - concerns are dealt with in a caring manner - children are encouraged and praised to help with self-esteem.' In this supportive environment pupils become strong advocates of healthy lifestyles; they behave well and know how to keep safe. Pupils enjoy school a lot but attendance is only satisfactory due to a small minority of poor attenders. Pupils are developing their basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) satisfactorily. They make a good contribution to the school and wider community through charitable fund raising and helping around the school as monitors and through the school council. Although a very small number of parents expressed a concern over behaviour, inspectors could find no evidence to support these concerns. The vast majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaires were overwhelmingly positive and supportive of the school. While leadership and management are good overall, some subject leaders are new to their roles and not yet fully effective in monitoring developments in their areas. Because of the school's positive record of accomplishment, the capacity for future improvement is good. Governance is satisfactory because several governors are new to their roles and not yet fully effective. Additional funds from the New Deal for Communities scheme have been well used in providing improvements to the school building; a new computer suite with equipment and staff and additional support staff.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the Reception class with knowledge, skills and understanding exceptionally below that expected for their age in most areas of learning, and in their mathematical development, they start with slightly better skills. Good links with local pre-schools and parents ensure a smooth transition into the Reception year. Children settle quickly and make a good

start because of the rich curriculum and good, sometimes outstanding, teaching. Children make good progress and achieve well, though standards remain below expectations by the end of the Reception year. Their personal development and well-being are good. They are encouraged to develop their skills of independent learning through well-organised and practical activities. The quality of leadership and management is very good. This is because it is successfully focused on developing the good provision, and ensuring the consistency in the quality of teaching and support, as well as ensuring equality of opportunity for all groups of children. All children, including those with learning, behavioural and physical difficulties, are cared for, guided and supported well. As a result, they enjoy school. As one Reception parent commented, 'My daughter loves it here and enjoys coming to school. Everyone is friendly and makes her feel welcome.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that in all lessons teachers use assessment better to provide tasks that are pitched at the right level of challenge for the pupils to raise standards in English and mathematics further.
- Improve the way targets are used to increase the involvement of pupils in their own learning.
- Develop the roles of subject leaders to increase the rigour of their monitoring of subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well in relation to their exceptionally low starting points on entry to the school. Standards are low in most areas when pupils enter Year 1 and are well below average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2. As pupils move up through the school, their rates of progress accelerate and are good and sometimes better. Consequently, by the end of Year 6 standards in English, mathematics and science are broadly average. Since the last inspection, the school has successfully focused on raising standards. This has led to much improved teaching that has accelerated the rates of progress of most pupils, particularly in Years 3 to 6. National tests show that pupils achieve well, although there remain some inconsistencies. In some classes, pupils could be doing better, particularly those of higher ability because teachers do not always set work that is sufficiently challenging. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well while those based in the special unit do much better than similar pupils nationally. Pupils are now reaching the standards expected for their age across the range of curriculum subjects, which is an improvement since the last inspection.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. They are generally eager to learn and enjoy lessons. Relationships throughout the school are positive because most pupils are well behaved, friendly, confident and polite. Pupils feel safe because they know that staff are ready to help. Pupils contribute well to the school and wider community by helping with a range of tasks. For example, at lunchtimes, Year 6 pupils manage the school office, greet visitors and answer the telephone. The School Council is involved in the appointment of teachers. Pupils are developing a good commitment to health through eating sensibly and taking regular exercise. However, this is not always reflected in pupils' packed lunches. Attendance rates are average and improving because of the rigorous procedures which are in place. Pupils are equipped with adequate

literacy and numeracy skills and good social skills, which contribute positively to the next stage of their education and their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers make lessons interesting which helps pupils enjoy learning and achieve well. Lessons are generally well matched to the pupils' needs but sometimes miss opportunities to challenge the more able. The school groups pupils by ability for English and mathematics and this is helping most pupils to make good progress, although more is needed to challenge those of higher ability. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported by learning assistants and often achieve very well. Teachers ask searching questions that encourage pupils to think hard. For example, in a stimulating mathematics lesson in Year 4, good questioning inspired the pupils to discuss how to solve a real life problem. However, good teaching is not yet consistent throughout the school. Teachers do not always manage well the unsettled behaviour of a few pupils and they do not consistently use learning targets to help pupils know what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum now provides well for all subjects, which is an improvement since the last inspection. It includes imaginative topics to link different subjects and is succeeding in making learning relevant and interesting for pupils. The curriculum provides well for the development of pupils' skills in English, mathematics, science and ICT, although sometimes, more able pupils are not challenged enough. The wide-ranging provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is particularly good, which enables them to achieve very well. Pupils' enjoyment and achievement are enhanced through a wide range of visits, visitors and extra activities, including residential visits for pupils in Years 3 to 6. All Year 2 and 3 pupils learn to play an instrument and have the opportunity to join the school's ensemble. There is a good range of enrichment activities, including well-supported clubs for the performing arts, sports, music and cookery. The popular family learning programmes enable parents to contribute positively to their children's learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The pastoral care of pupils is outstanding. Staff have very good relationships which helps pupils grow in confidence. Staff are especially thoughtful and caring in their induction of new pupils which enables them to settle quickly. The school links very well with parents to promote care. One parent, echoing the views of many said, 'It is good to know I can talk to staff about any concerns with my child.' Vulnerable pupils, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities are extremely well supported by the school, often in good partnership with outside agencies. Procedures for safeguarding all pupils are securely in place. Procedures for promoting attendance are good but there remains a small group of families that still do not ensure their children attend regularly. Although assessment is used well to track pupils' progress, the information gained is not always used sufficiently well by teachers to guide pupils in their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The very strong leadership and clear vision of the headteacher is driving the school to provide pupils with a good education and outstanding care. Many parents appreciate this. As one wrote, 'Thornhill is a great school - the headteacher is an asset.' Together with the good support from her assistant headteachers, she has led the school to make significant improvements by her high expectations and challenging targets. Whereas in the past, pupils were leaving the school with very low standards in Year 6, now they are broadly average. School leaders have used their accurate evaluations of the school's strengths and weaknesses to plan for improvements. They have focussed generous staffing levels at those year groups where progress was slower and they have skilfully targeted groups of pupils for extra support. As a result, many of the pupils make consistently good progress. School leaders have created a highly caring ethos, which is reflected in the excellent provision for the social and emotional needs of vulnerable pupils. It also provides well for the personal development of all pupils.

Now that school leaders have secured key improvements in pupils' progress and standards, they have rightly begun to distribute leadership to other staff. More responsibilities have been passed to the subject leaders for English, mathematics and science. They have made a good start with leading their areas but they are not yet fully monitoring their subjects. Governors provide satisfactory support and are increasingly developing their roles to undertake more robust monitoring of the school's performance in order to hold it fully to account.

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

Achievement and standards

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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
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	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	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

28 March 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Thornhill Primary School, Southampton, SO19 6FH

Thank you for making the inspectors feel so welcome at your school and for being so helpful when we spoke to you. We found your school to be good.

What we like most about your school is:

- you told us how well the staff care for you and we found this to be good overall with some outstanding aspects
- how well most of you are making progress
- your good behaviour
- you are keen to have healthy lifestyles
- you are good at helping around the school and you enjoy school a lot.

To help improve your school further we have asked your teachers to help you do even better in English and mathematics. We have asked them to do this by setting you work that is not too easy or too difficult. We have also asked your teachers to make sure you understand your targets. You can help by trying to remember these for yourselves. You can also help by making sure that you all attend school regularly. We have also asked the staff and leaders to carry on checking how well you are doing to make sure that the school continues to improve.

Thank you once again for your help. We wish you very good luck for the future with your new headteacher.

Yours sincerely

Mike Dukes

Lead Inspector