

Thorpe Hall Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103060
Local Authority	Waltham Forest
Inspection number	323740
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	453
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	Mr Kevin Patmore
Headteacher	Mrs Paulette Houghton
Date of previous school inspection	23 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Hale End Road London E17 4DP
Telephone number	020 8527 4062
Fax number	020 8523 0397

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Pupil mobility is well above average in this large primary school, which serves a rapidly changing community. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds has risen to two thirds, and the number with a mother tongue other than English has doubled in the last two years to well above average. Free school meal eligibility is marginally above the national average. The proportion of pupils who need additional support with their learning is above average, and the number with a statement of special educational need is broadly average. Most of these pupils are identified with moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is through a part-time Nursery and two Reception classes. The school has gained Healthy School status and the International School award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The judgement that the effectiveness of Thorpe Hall Primary is satisfactory is not as favourable as the school's view of many areas of its work. The school has some good features, including aspects of the curriculum and the way that the care and support provided for pupils successfully promotes their personal development. Pupils clearly understand what is needed for them to adopt a safe and healthy lifestyle. They enjoy school and are proud of the contribution they make to its development and to the wider community. They mostly behave well and show respect for others.

From skills on entry that are below those expected for their age, pupils make satisfactory progress. Standards had improved but fell in 2008 to be below average by the end of Year 6. The school has tackled shortcomings in writing, although there has been more success with older pupils. The action to reverse the recent fall in Year 6 test results for mathematics has been effective. The main reason why achievement has fallen to satisfactory since the last inspection is that inconsistencies have emerged in teaching that have not been tackled sufficiently robustly. While there are some examples of outstanding teaching, there is not always a sharp enough focus on the learning of individuals and groups. Furthermore, computers and other new technology are not used inventively enough to enhance teaching and learning.

The school is making good progress in its aim of providing more interesting and stimulating experiences for all pupils. Activities such as drama workshops, sports coaching and the teaching of French add much to the pupils' personal development. Productive links have also been established with schools in Lille and Tanzania. Older pupils greatly enjoy their residential visit to France. This has been recognised by the International Schools award. The pupils also contribute considerably to the wider community such as through collections for charity and sponsoring a child in Uganda. The pupils value the increasing diversity around them, helping to make the school a harmonious place in which everyone is treated with respect. It is into this atmosphere that newcomers are able to settle quickly and make lasting friendships.

Staff and governors have introduced appropriate activities to support families and encourage them to be part of the school's community. Events such as 'Asian Week' and 'International Languages Week' have drawn parents into school and have encouraged them to share their customs and values with others. Further activities have stemmed from this. However, the evaluation of the impact of these and other initiatives on the changing pupil profile is not sharp enough for the school to identify where action is successful or where a different approach is needed. For example, while it is recognised that there are many more pupils with a mother tongue other than English, lessons are not always adapted sufficiently to focus on how to develop the pupils' language skills more rapidly.

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school's direction, which is one that is shared by the staff team. Senior staff and governors recognise the school's qualities and where improvements are needed, but do not always focus on how their planned actions are to improve the pupils' achievement. There is scope for improvement in the accuracy and impact of self-evaluation.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The children's welfare is given a high priority in the Nursery and Reception classes. As one parent wrote, 'My child has settled in well, thanks to the care she receives from her teachers.'

The children feel secure, become confident learners and enjoy their first experiences of school life. As a result, their personal, social and emotional skills develop well. They behave sensibly and have positive relationships with adults and other children.

Provision is improving, but the quality of the children's learning is inconsistent. They make satisfactory progress from their starting points, although a significant minority do not reach the expected goals by the time they enter Year 1. Their attainment is lowest in communication and language, as this is the weakest aspect when they start Nursery. Opportunities are missed to develop the language skills of the increasing number of children for whom English is not their mother tongue. Members of staff do not have high enough expectations of the children's responses to their questions, do not always model language effectively or adopt methods to help them to achieve greater fluency.

Activities do not always ensure that the more-able children receive consistently challenging work. The outdoor areas for Nursery and Reception are used to enrich learning, but activities are not planned sufficiently carefully to deepen understanding, particularly for more-able children. New procedures to track the children's progress have been introduced, but the information gained is not used sufficiently to plan the next steps in each child's learning or to evaluate the effectiveness of provision on the children's development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Bring greater consistency to teaching by ensuring that teachers focus on promoting the learning of individuals and groups of pupils.
- Raise achievement in Nursery and Reception by focusing more precisely on language skills, extending the more-able children and using outdoor areas more creatively.
- Sharpen self-evaluation and ensure that priorities for improvement are focused more robustly on the pupils' academic development.

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

Pupils are given a sound platform for success at secondary school and beyond, making satisfactory progress in all key areas. Year 2 test results have risen since the last inspection and were broadly average in 2008. Writing results were slightly lower than reading and mathematics, because fewer pupils reached nationally expected levels. Current assessment data suggest that writing standards remain behind these other two subjects at Year 2 but have improved across Key Stage 2. Year 6 test results fell in all subjects to slightly below average in 2008. The proportion of pupils reaching the nationally expected Level 4 in mathematics was low. Subsequent action to increase the number of pupils working at expected levels in mathematics, by developing their ability to apply their skills to the solution of problems, is starting to bear fruit. More Year 6 pupils are on track to reach Level 4 this year than in 2008. Pupils generally reach their targets, but these are not sufficiently challenging to act as a tool to raise standards higher.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils from many different backgrounds work well and play happily together. They show care and consideration towards each other. The pupils and a small number of parents expressed concern about aspects of behaviour. While most pupils behave well, some distractions occur when lessons do not hold the pupils' attention sufficiently. Pupils feel safe at school and fully understand what to do if they feel unhappy. The older pupils talk about a shared sense of community both within the school and in its immediate surroundings. One Year 6 pupil described the school as 'one student body working towards a common goal'. They greatly enjoy school activities, particularly when they find lessons stimulating. However, attendance has fallen to below average in spite of the valiant efforts of the school to improve it. Pupils make healthy choices at mealtimes and show a good understanding of the need to eat sensibly. Through their council, pupils feel they have a voice in the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There are some outstanding lessons where teaching is lively and interesting, grabbing the pupils' attention from the start and moving their learning forward at pace. In these classrooms there is a sense of excitement and pupils have the confidence that their contributions are valued. Teachers here are very clear about what learning they will promote and share this with the pupils, along with how to identify if they have achieved the intended outcomes. This, and opportunities for pupils to assess their own work and that of their peers, gives them a good understanding of the purpose of each lessons and how well they are doing. However, these are not features seen in all classrooms. The best teachers are skilled at supporting the language development of pupils new to learning English. They emphasise correct vocabulary, use resources inventively and patiently give pupils the time to phrase their responses to questions or get them to rehearse them in discussion with others. However, this is not universal and accounts for the slower pace to learning and the engagement of pupils in a significant minority of classrooms.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides an interesting and rich curriculum which is much enjoyed by learners. The subjects of the National Curriculum are well supported by an array of extra-curricular activities including team sports, music and drama. Enrichment is also provided in the form of participation in local community events such as the Waltham Forest Youth Carnival, which is extremely well supported by the school and popular with pupils. International dimensions are strengthened through French teaching that starts in the Nursery. The school makes inventive use of a local theatre group to provide weekly drama sessions, which in turn helps to develop the pupils' self-esteem and language skills. The school is taking the opportunity to link learning in subjects more closely, adding greater enjoyment and helping to develop the pupils' skills more coherently. However, opportunities are missed to plan for the use information and communication technology to support and enhance learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The pupils' welfare is a high priority for the school and members of staff respond to their concerns promptly. The needs of pupils who need extra help with their learning are identified early and well-planned intervention programmes are put in place, although the strategies implemented are new and have not had sufficient time to improve their achievement. Vulnerable pupils are supported sensitively, with good links established with outside agencies to guide and support their development. Academic guidance is not quite as effective. Procedures for checking the pupils' progress are thorough and information is used well to set individual targets. However, there is considerable inconsistency in their use by staff in helping pupils to take the next steps in their learning or work towards longer-term goals. The best marking seen informs pupils what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work, but this is not universal and school policy is not followed in all classes.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and her senior team provide the school with a clear direction based on trying to remove barriers to learning for all pupils. This aim is shared by the staff team and supported by committed governors. There is a successful focus on developing the pupils' personal qualities but the team is having less impact on their academic achievement. Systems to improve the performance of staff have led to improvements in some areas, but have not focused sufficiently sharply on how to improve the learning of all pupils. The school broadly understands its qualities and the areas where action is needed. It has a wealth of data to check the pupils' progress and put in place support programmes where there is identified danger of underachievement, but it does not use this information to identify quickly if its actions are having any success. Furthermore, improvement-planning is focused too much on actions to be taken rather than how they are to improve the pupils' academic and personal development.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
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?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

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/or disabilities make progress	3

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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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 eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

19 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thorpe Hall Primary School, London, E17 4DP

Thank you for helping the inspectors when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking with you, visiting your lessons and looking at your work. We saw that you are happy in school, behave well and get on well with each other. You show a good understanding of how to keep fit and healthy and clearly enjoy sport and drama. You told us that the adults look after you well and that you can go to them if you have any worries or concerns. You are lucky to have some interesting activities in addition to your daily lessons.

We found that your school is providing you with a satisfactory education. You make satisfactory progress during your time in the school. There are some good features to the teaching and the range of activities in lessons, but there are also some aspects that we have asked the school to improve. The things that we have asked the school to do are to:

- make sure lessons help everyone to learn more quickly
- make learning more challenging for the children in the Nursery and Reception classes by using the outdoor areas better and giving more attention to children who are new to English
- check up more carefully on how well the school is helping you to learn and improving your academic and personal achievements.

We are sure that you and your teachers will work hard to make this improvement. You can play your part in helping the school to get even better by continuing to work hard at all times and attending regularly.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Martin Beale

Lead Inspector