

Thorpe Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107832
Local Authority	Leeds
Inspection number	324660
Inspection dates	10–11 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Joe Peacock

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)	147
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	Mrs M Daniels
Headteacher	Mrs E Kus
Date of previous school inspection	7 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Dolphin Lane Thorpe Wakefield West Yorkshire WF3 3DG
Telephone number	0113 3368760
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This smaller than average school is located in a geographically isolated community with few amenities and high unemployment. The former industrial village is split in two by a motorway and has three new private estates being built near it. There is provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage with children taught in a Nursery and Reception unit. Some 7% of pupils are from minority ethnic families but only a very small minority need support to learn English. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well above average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also well above average. The transient nature of the population results in more pupils than usual arriving or leaving during term time. A major building programme to extend and refurbish the school has caused periods of severe disruption since the previous inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. It is giving good value for money. The inspection mostly agrees with the school's self-evaluation. However, the care, support and guidance for pupils are judged to be outstanding rather than good because all aspects have been further strengthened since the previous inspection. As a result, pupils are happy and keen to learn. 'Could not wish for better,' was a typical comment from parents.

Pupils' personal development is good. They have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and stay safe. The mutual respect pupils and teachers share, the calm atmosphere for learning and pupils' good behaviour enable them to enjoy school. Parents are very supportive and hold very positive views about the school, as shown in the inspection questionnaires. The experience and expertise of the headteacher have been instrumental in successfully maintaining the good quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection, despite the many challenges and frustrations caused by a long drawn out and problematic building programme. Staff work effectively as a team and share the headteacher's passion to improve quality and raise standards. The good quality of the curriculum, which is being constantly reviewed and improved, provides pupils with challenging, interesting experiences tailored to meet their needs, and ensuring their future economic well-being.

Pupils' achievement is good. All make good progress from starting points well below those usually expected in the Nursery to the end of their Reception Year because the Early Years Foundation Stage provision is well managed. Staff work effectively together to ensure that children settle in quickly and have activities that will capture their interest. However, planning for outdoor learning is not to the same high standard as it is for indoor learning. Pupils' good progress continues in Years 1 to 6 and there is an improving trend in standards in national tests despite the annual fluctuations caused mainly by the small number of pupils being tested. Although overall standards are broadly average by the end of Year 2, few pupils attain above average standards in reading and writing. By the end of Year 6, standards are just below average in English overall because of pupils' weaker performance in writing. The school has introduced a range of strategies to raise standards in writing, but these have not yet had time to make an impact. Standards are average in mathematics and above average in science. Recent improvements in assessment and the careful tracking of pupils' progress enable teachers quickly to identify and support pupils who are falling behind in literacy and numeracy. The strong performance in science is due to teachers' expertise and science topics that encourage pupils to carry out investigations for themselves.

Teachers and teaching assistants work effectively together to support pupils' learning in the classroom or in small groups withdrawn for more intense support. Parent volunteers play their part in helping to raise standards in reading. The support and guidance for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is excellent, enabling them to make good progress. Pupils enjoy the wide range of visits and visitors as well as the many school clubs that further enhance the curriculum and provide pupils with enjoyable learning experiences.

Leadership and management are good. All staff carefully monitor pupils' progress at the end of each term, and are beginning to monitor the quality and effectiveness of their teaching by observing one another's lessons. Governance is good. Governors are very supportive and the chair of governors, who has a very good knowledge of the school, is leading them well.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the Nursery with the full range of skills and abilities but, overall, they are well below those expected for their age. Children make good progress towards the early learning goals because of effective teaching. When they enter Year 1, about two thirds meet national expectations in all areas of learning. Children make particularly good progress in their personal, social and emotional development because of the support they receive from the extremely caring and attentive staff. All have excellent relationships with adults and with each other. Welfare requirements are fully met and, as a result, children feel safe and secure, are well behaved and enjoy their learning. Literacy and numeracy skills are relatively weak for many. Parent volunteers help support children as they read and enjoy activities planned by staff to specifically promote these vital skills. Children in Reception have a daily phonics session to learn letter sounds. This is having a significant impact in raising standards in literacy. Crispin, the bird puppet, challenged a group to identify objects hidden in boxes beginning with the 'sh' sound, for example.

Teaching is good with planning giving equal weight to the six areas of learning. Staff provide exciting activities that invariably engage children's interest. All were excited when, for example, they investigated ice cubes and named polar animals. The unit is carefully planned to be stimulating and inviting with its own computers, creative areas and Chinese restaurant for role-play. Outdoor provision is limited at present partly because of the disruption caused by the construction of the new accommodation. Planning for outdoor learning does not currently provide the same range or breadth as that for indoors. Assessment procedures are based on the close observation of children and the information gained is used well by staff to match new learning to meet children's needs. Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Teachers and teaching assistants work closely as an effective team. The flexible hours for attending effectively meet the needs of some parents and their children. A few parents were taught by the same experienced teacher when they were in Reception, making the strong relationships between home and school even stronger for them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in reading and writing by the end of Year 2 and in writing by the end of Year 6.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, ensure that planning provides the same wide range of learning opportunities outdoors as it does indoors.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The excellent atmosphere for learning in most classes ensures that pupils make good progress from their starting points. The overall trend is one of improving standards with challenging targets being set and usually met. However, overall standards vary considerably from year to year partly because of the differing proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in each of the relatively small year groups. The significant movement of pupils is another contributing factor. By the end of Year 2 standards in reading, writing and mathematics are broadly average with most pupils making good progress. Standards in reading and writing vary the most, being significantly above average one year and significantly below in another. More effective assessment in mathematics is enabling teachers quickly to provide support for

pupils who need it and this is helping to iron out the differences. Pupils' good progress continues in the junior classes and by the end of Year 6 standards are just below average in English, average in mathematics and above average in science. In English, reading skills have been improved markedly by parent volunteers supporting staff and hearing pupils read but overall standards in writing are below average. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress largely due to the wide range of effective intervention strategies which are designed to support their learning and boost their confidence and self-esteem.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

In assembly, pupils sing, 'T.H.O.R.P.E. Wherever I go, whatever I do, I'll make you proud of me!' Another line is 'We'll never disappoint if you put us to the test!' The school aim is to 'build better brains' and in each class are the words, 'together we are awesome!' These positive messages reflect the caring and supportive learning environment and the good personal development of pupils. Most are proud of their school and show a strong determination to do their best for their teachers. Attendance is just below average, having dipped because of the erratic attendance of a small minority.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good, overall. Behaviour is usually exemplary, only falling short in lessons where pupils' concentration wavers because they are not fully challenged by their work. In some classes, cultural awareness has a higher profile than in others. Pupils enjoy looking after younger ones and show a genuine concern and care for others. They strive to be valued members of the school, wearing their school council and house captain badges with pride. Assemblies and close links to the parish church successfully reinforce pupils' spiritual, moral and social development and provide good opportunities for participation and reflection.

Pupils' awareness of how to be healthy and keep safe is good. All thoroughly enjoyed dancing to music in the 'wake-up and shake-up' session, for example, and the healthy tuck shop is popular. Their participation in the activities that are offered outside the classroom and in the local community is good. They help run the school bank, for example. Pupils leave school with good computer skills, the ability to work cooperatively with others and an ambition to do their best. This prepares them well for the next stage of their education and equips them with valuable skills for life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Relationships between staff and pupils and pupils' eagerness to learn are key strengths which ensure that pupils make good progress. When asked if they liked school, one pupil quickly replied, 'love it!' Another said, 'Our teachers are funny, in a nice way!' The consistently good quality of teaching and learning ensure that there is a calm, purposeful atmosphere in most lessons and pupils regard learning as fun. On the occasions where teaching was outstanding, teacher's enthusiasm was infectious and pupils were highly motivated to write and deliver their own weather forecast. Many were beaming with their own success after their performance which included 'wow' words. Other pupils thoroughly enjoyed listening to a superb story teller. Teaching and learning were not to the same high standard when a lengthy introduction was delivered at too fast a pace, leaving some pupils behind, and when work that was clearly too

easy was given to some pupils. The conscientious teaching assistants play a vital role in helping the few pupils who speak English as an additional language and pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities to understand new work and to complete their tasks. Teachers' marking is thorough and their comments often show pupils how they can improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The staff are well on the way to developing their own effective curriculum which is tailored to meet the interests and needs of pupils and raise standards. Recent initiatives introduced in writing and a more refined assessment procedure to give an accurate picture of pupils' progress in mathematics are beginning to raise standards. Pupils are fascinated by 'wow' words and take delight in identifying long, interesting and atmospheric words which they can then use to improve their own writing. The contribution the curriculum makes to pupils' personal development and well-being is a strength. Special 'circle time' sessions give good opportunities for pupils to discuss a range of issues that contribute to their care and consideration for others. Pupils enjoy learning French and German and support one another in lessons as they often work with partners. For its size, the school provides a good variety of enrichment activities. Pupils have a residential experience at an outdoor centre and clubs such as Bollywood dancing, skipping and netball are well attended. The home-school partnership is a strength. Parents are well informed about what pupils are doing in lessons and clearly value what the school is providing for their children.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The dedicated and extremely caring staff are fully committed to promoting the welfare and well-being of pupils, whatever their needs. 'Pupils blossom and achieve,' is a typical view of parents. The enjoyable activities provided in the Treehouse nurture sessions, for example, successfully raise pupils' confidence and self-esteem, enabling them to be fully included in lessons. All safeguarding procedures are in place and the learning mentor has developed excellent procedures to monitor and promote good attendance. All that can be done is being done to encourage pupils to attend. Effective behaviour and anti-bullying policies ensure that behaviour is not an issue affecting any pupils' enjoyment of school or their learning. Pupils are adamant that there is no bullying.

An overwhelming majority of parents in their responses to the inspection questionnaire are supportive of the school, for example, calling it a 'lovely, small, friendly school' that they would 'recommend to anyone'. The request from a very small minority of parents for more after-school clubs is unrealistic given the staff's commitment to provide clubs during most lunchtimes and almost every evening after school. Good partnerships and links with external agencies ensure that pupils, including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are exceptionally well supported. This enables them to make the same good progress as other pupils. Excellent arrangements are in place to assess and track the progress of pupils and the information gained is used extremely well to set challenging new targets. Pupils are beginning to review their own progress competently, making them much more aware of how well they have done and how they can improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The calm and effective leadership of the headteacher has steered the school through some challenging times, caused mainly by the major building programme. The strength of leadership is largely responsible for the continuing confidence of parents and the excellent reputation the school enjoys in the local community. The Deputy headteacher and staff form a strong and cohesive team with a shared vision and clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Previous issues have been successfully resolved. Recent curriculum initiatives are having a positive impact in bringing about improvements and giving the school a good capacity for further improvement. The school is a happy place to be. Staff share a strong sense of responsibility for the care and education of all pupils. As a result, pupils benefit from being members of a strong cohesive school 'family' that is also outward looking to the local community, and to the diversity of communities in the wider world.

Members of the governing body are knowledgeable and very supportive. The finances of the school are managed efficiently and, as a result, the school is well resourced. Pupils are taught in relatively small classes in their spacious new building as the development of new housing has been suspended because of the current economic climate. Governors are involved with setting priorities and are rapidly developing their skills to monitor and evaluate all aspects of school life.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
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?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	2

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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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?	1

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

Thank you for being so friendly when I was with you. During the inspection of your school, you helped me to find out all I needed to know about how well you work and learn. Please thank all your mums, dads and carers for completing the questionnaire. I had a really good response and it was good to see how pleased they are with your school.

T.H.O.R.P.E was put to the test and did very well! Your school is a good school with some excellent things happening there. There is so much for you to do and to enjoy like the interesting after-school clubs and 'wake up and shake up.

In the Nursery and Reception unit, it was good to see how busy all of you were. I expect you are looking forward to moving into your new unit next term. I have asked staff to plan even more for you to do outside when you get your new larger outdoor area.

Your parents told me how well you get on with your teachers in Years 1 to 6 and how much you enjoy school. In most classes you could hear a pin drop as you concentrated and worked hard to finish all your work. Well done! I have asked your teachers to concentrate more on helping you to improve your reading and writing. I hope you keep finding those 'wow' words to make your writing sparkle and flow and try to read more on your own rather than just to teachers or the parent helpers.

It was a pleasure to meet your hard working headteacher and all the staff who take such excellent care of you. They are doing a good job, making school an exciting, fun place for you all.

Thank you again for making my visit to your school so special.