

Thurnham Church of England Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118629
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326861
Inspection date	29 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Eileen Chadwick

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	Infant
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	270
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	John Wale
Headteacher	Freda Denyer
Date of previous school inspection	27 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	The Landway Bearsted Maidstone ME14 4BL
Telephone number	01622 737685
Fax number	01622 630173

Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the evenness of high standards and progress across the school for different groups, especially more capable pupils, including the gifted and talented
- the extent of good and outstanding teaching and its impact on pupils' achievement
- the impact of leadership and management on raising achievement, especially through developments made in the curriculum and teaching, and through self-evaluation.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, discussions with pupils and staff, a review of the assessment data the school uses to track pupils' progress, and analyses of pupils' work. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included, where appropriate, in this report.

Description of the school

This is a large infant school whose pupils are often drawn from relatively advantaged backgrounds where few are entitled to free school meals. Although the overall proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than that seen in most schools, an above average proportion has statements of educational needs. These pupils mainly have speech and language, physical and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Most pupils are of White British background. The Early Years Foundation Stage children are in three Reception classes.

The school has gained Active Mark, Healthy Schools and Primary Geography Gold Quality Mark awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This school is outstanding. It is a highly inclusive school where every individual is valued and pupils of all abilities flourish in this warm, welcoming and vibrant environment. The academic performance of pupils in reading, writing, mathematics and science is exceptional and the innovative curriculum also enables them to develop their creative, sporting and practical talents to high levels. The meticulous degree of care and attention given to supporting each pupil ensures that pupils' personal development and behaviour are excellent. Pupils love school and this is a springboard for their learning. Parents are delighted with the school; as one parent explained, 'This is a wonderful school with a nurturing environment; my child loves to come. The school has consistently served the community extremely well.'

Pupils' achievement is excellent. From starting points that are above those seen in most schools, children's flying start in the Early Years Foundation Stage leads to well above average standards on entry to Year 1. Outstanding progress continues in Years 1 and 2 and, by Year 2, standards are exceptionally high in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Pupils also produce work of high quality in other areas of the curriculum, notably the humanities and design and technology. By Year 2, pupils' creative and factual writing is stunning and its quality often exceeds that expected for older pupils. Pupils of all abilities make rapid progress, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Very focused programmes meet the wide range of learning needs of these pupils with support staff making a valuable contribution to this. The progress of gifted and talented pupils is exceptional because these pupils are identified early and they are provided with very consistent levels of challenge. Initiatives for improving the teaching of calculation in mathematics and thinking skills are having a particularly positive impact on pupils' progress.

The sustained outstanding leadership of the headteacher, a strong senior team and a first-rate governing body ensure that the focus on accelerating pupils' achievement is the central priority. Their vision is shared by staff who have high expectations of themselves and their pupils and continually seek ways to improve. The rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluating all aspects of the school's work have led to the school accurately pinpointing and acting quickly on any areas for improvement. This is a major reason why the school has maintained and built upon the excellence found at the time of the previous inspection.

The quality of teaching is excellent. Teachers have considerable subject expertise and this helps them to provide high levels of challenge for the large proportion of more capable pupils. They manage their pupils very well and are skilled in helping them learn through the direct learning of skills as well as through solving problems. Teachers' skills are up to date and are rigorously monitored by senior and middle managers. These strengths are built upon and any areas for improvement are addressed through professional development. Teachers share their expertise and this has helped to produce consistently high quality teaching and learning. Assessment is rigorous and school leaders and teachers check closely to make sure pupils reach the demanding targets set. However, the school has identified the need to make assessments in Reception computer-based rather than on paper in order to streamline self-evaluation. The school very successfully reaches out to its wide-ranging community so that all parents and carers may play a full part in educating their children.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exemplary. Strong support from the local church and the community help to promote this. Community cohesion is excellent. Outreach

events in which the school interacts with wider communities, including with other schools, to share its expertise and to learn from them is extensive. Well-developed international links enhance pupils' understanding of pupils' lives in other countries. Although the ethos of the school is strongly Christian, children develop a good understanding of the range of different cultures and faiths in Britain today through a range of visitors and curriculum events. Pupils' own contributions to the school and wider community are excellent. The thriving school council is a very good vehicle for enabling pupils to contribute to school decision-making. The gardening club, work with a local Woodland Trust and recycling activities give the pupils first-rate practical experiences of caring for their planet. From the moment they enter the school, pupils are valued, extremely well cared for and kept safe. Safeguarding arrangements are very rigorous and meet statutory requirements. The school works very effectively with outside specialists to support pupils with high level learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Good attendance is rigorously promoted and achieved.

The curriculum provides a firm foundation for pupils to learn basic skills and to experiment and create. It is of a high quality in many areas as well as in literacy and numeracy, including the arts, history, geography, design and technology and sport. Pupils' learning in one subject enhances another, bringing learning to life. Subjects such as art and design and technology, role play and a rich programme of visits and visitors are often used to underpin academic learning. Vivid artwork and role play related to the theme of 'The Great Fire of London' really captured pupils' interest. Careful teaching and pupils' own investigations led to pupils writing remarkable factual accounts as well as exciting stories. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used very well to support learning across the curriculum and plays a large part in developing pupils' independent research skills. Pupils develop an extremely good understanding of healthy lifestyles and thoroughly enjoy all the exciting sports activities that are offered to them.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Arrangements to help children settle are excellent and they quickly become used to routines because the classrooms provide calm but productive and exciting learning environments. Parents are delighted with how quickly children settle. The high standards of care and safety help children to feel secure and happy. Children greatly enjoy being in Reception because there is an excellent range of learning activities and a lively and practical curriculum indoors and out. Children make excellent progress due to the outstanding teaching they receive. By the time they begin Year 1, most have reached the expected levels and many exceed them, including in reading, writing and mathematics. There is a good balance for children to learn through purposeful play and adult-led sessions. Role play activities, linked to topics, really bring learning alive. During the inspection, the pupils developed their interest and understanding of Africa through 'The Travel Agents' and, also when in 'The Hide', observing animals during 'Safari'. Pupils come to love writing and choose to record their observations during such activities. There are some excellent opportunities for children to learn mathematics through indoor and outdoor play. Very capable children are quickly identified and given more challenging work. Assessment systems are thorough but paper-based rather than on the computer and this is an identified area for improvement. The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage and teamwork between staff are excellent.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement a computer-based system for recording children's assessments in the Early Years Foundation Stage so teachers and school leaders can evaluate pupils' progress more easily.

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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?	1
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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**

29 April 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Thurnham Church of England Infant School, Maidstone ME14 4BL

Thank you very much for the friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We really enjoyed finding out about the interesting things you do.

First, you need to know your school is outstanding and you make excellent progress. There are some brilliant things about your school.

- You reach very high standards in reading, writing, mathematics and science.
- Those of you in Reception get off to a fantastic start.
- You help to make your school such a special place because you are helpful, work hard and behave extremely well.
- You understand how important it is to keep fit and healthy and enjoy lots of sport. You know you should not eat too many sweets and cakes.
- You have many wonderful learning opportunities, for example in ICT, design and technology, art, music, history, geography and sport.
- Your headteacher leads you all extremely well and all the staff and governors think very carefully about what is best for you.
- Staff take very good care of you. You get extra help if you need it so you can learn new things as quickly as possible.

This is what we are asking the school to improve:

- in Reception, help teachers and managers to check your progress more easily by using computers.

We hope you will continue to enjoy school and continue to work hard in all you do.

Yours faithfully

Eileen Chadwick

Lead inspector