

Thirsk Community Primary School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 121365 |
| Local authority | North Yorkshire |
| Inspection number | 327470 |
| Inspection dates | 9–10 June 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Cathryn Kirby HMI |

The inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 290 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Adrian Maude |
| Headteacher | Mr R Wild |
| Date of previous school inspection | March 2006 |
| School address | Hambleton Place Thirsk YO7 1SL |
| Telephone number | 01845 524349 |
| Fax number | 01845 524349 |
| Email address | headteacher@thirsk-pri.n-yorks.sch.uk |

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|--------------------|----------------|
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons, held meetings with staff, governors and pupils, and spoke informally with parents and carers. They observed the school's work, and scrutinised a wide range of documentation including the school's development plan, pupils' work and 90 responses to parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the appropriateness and impact of actions taken by the school to secure further improvement since the last inspection
- the progress made by pupils towards attainment targets set for 2009
- the extent to which teaching enables pupils with different learning needs and abilities to make good progress in their learning.

Information about the school

Thirsk Community Primary school is a larger than average primary school with an Early Years Foundation Stage. The majority of children are from White British backgrounds. Since the last inspection there has been a slow decline in the school's roll and a slight increase in the number of children from Eastern Europe who speak little or no English. The Nursery is full to capacity. The school also serves a growing number of children from a nearby traveller site. The proportion of pupils entitled to a free school meal is average. A quarter of all pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities: this is much higher than average. In June 2008 a Children's Centre managed by North Yorkshire County Council Children's Services was opened on the school's site.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Thirsk Community Primary School is a good school which cares exceptionally well for its pupils who thrive in a nurturing environment. Pupils enjoy coming to school and parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with the quality of provision. A comment from one parent summed up those from the vast majority: 'Thirsk Community Primary is a superb school. My son feels he is part of a big happy family group.'

Pupils' experiences are enriched through a programme of exciting visits, clubs and after-school activities. A thoughtful approach to the use of space inside and outside classrooms has created a vibrant environment which stimulates imagination and creativity. A firm commitment to equalities underpins a bespoke provision well-matched to the needs of vulnerable pupils. Staff are proud of their school and the success they have in preparing every child for the future.

Excellent provision in the Nursery and Reception allows children to make very good progress from low starting points. By the time they leave school pupils have reached standards that are slightly above average because of good teaching, which enables them to progress well. Steps taken by the school to develop pupils' literacy skills have improved standards in reading and writing. Pupils needing additional support make better progress than similar groups nationally because of the close attention the school pays to supporting their individual learning needs. The school acknowledges that progress across subjects can be uneven due to inconsistencies in lesson planning.

In lessons, a variety of imaginative activities captures pupils' interest. Regular opportunities are planned for pupils to develop their skills in listening and speaking confidently. Staff know their pupils very well and this ensures that they are able to take the steps necessary to keep pupils on track. Less effective lessons do not take into account well enough the different stages pupils are at. In particular this can result in a lack of challenge for the most able pupils and this limits their progress. Overall, satisfactory use is made of information and communication technology resources to support learning, although the skills and confidence of individual teachers in using interactive whiteboards varies. The school has suitable plans in place to develop the use of this technology in classrooms.

Children are taught to value and respect each others differences from an early age. Positive relationships are evident between all members of the school community. The sensible attitudes of many pupils mean they get the most out of the opportunities presented to work independently. Consistently high expectations and good classroom

management are reflected in the pupils' good behaviour. The school council manage their own budget and are proud of their work to fund development of the outdoor areas. Many pupils represent their school at local events, which develops their sense of community. However, their opportunities to think about the different lives and beliefs of other people in Britain and around the world are more limited. The school has worked tirelessly to sustain attendance levels despite the irregular attendance of a small minority of pupils.

The headteacher and senior staff have a secure view of the school's strengths and take appropriate actions to tackle weaknesses. However, systems to evaluate the impact of the school's work are not sufficiently rigorous to ensure consistently outstanding practice. Strong links with a range of outside agencies provide specialist support to address the needs of individual pupils and their families. These partnerships have a significant impact on pupils' well-being.

A new approach to whole school literacy has improved standards in English. Action taken to develop positive attitudes to learning is reflected in the pupils' good behaviour and willingness to participate in lessons. Through these actions the school has demonstrated good capacity to improve. Systems to monitor the schools work would benefit from greater rigour to ensure that the very good and outstanding practice now becomes a consistent feature of provision.

The proximity of a new Children's Centre has benefited the school through stronger links with families and access to additional outside space.

What does the school need to do to improve further

- Achieve greater consistency in teaching across all subjects in order to improve learning and progress by:
 - making better use of lesson planning to ensure that all children work on activities that stretch them
 - sharing more systematically the good and outstanding practice that exists within the school
 - developing further the use of information and communication technology to support learning in the classroom.
- Sharpen whole-school approaches to improve good practice to outstanding and satisfactory practice to good by:
 - developing a more systematic approach to monitoring the impact of actions identified within the school's development plan
 - increasing the rigour of self-evaluation to ensure that actions taken to improve provision are having the intended impact.
- Raise the profile of the cultural dimension of the curriculum by extending the range of opportunities to develop children's awareness of other cultures in the national and global context.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Outcomes for pupils' personal development and learning are good overall and outstanding in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children enter Nursery with skills below those expected for their age. In the 2008 national tests for Year 6, pupils made at least satisfactory progress from their starting points. Standards rose in all subjects compared to 2007 and were slightly above average. The school's current assessment information and evidence from observation of teaching and learning during this inspection, confirm that the pattern of improvement continues. Pupils make good progress. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected and higher levels in English and mathematics is likely to exceed the school's revised targets for 2009.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those pupils in receipt of free school meals make better progress than similar groups nationally. The school's current assessment information and evidence from observation of teaching and learning during this inspection confirm that pupils make good progress relative to their start points. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected and higher levels in English and mathematics is likely to exceed the schools targets for 2009.

The school meets the needs of pupils with specific learning disabilities, those for whom English is an additional language and the small, but increasing, group of traveller children very well. As a result, all these children make good progress. Parents speak highly of the learning support offered to their children.

Pupils understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Sports feature prominently in the lives of many pupils. Healthy school lunches are promoted through the weekly newsletter to parents. Pupils' and parents' views on the menu are sought, but uptake remains lower than the school would wish.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Pupils' good social, moral and spiritual development is evident in their relationships with and respect for one another. They listen to and value what others have to say. Pupils enjoy school and say they feel safe. Pupils' views influence decisions in the improvement of school: for example, how to make the best use of outside space.

Preparing children to take their place in the wider community begins in the Nursery where a focus on developing important life-skills is evident through imaginative play areas which simulate situations children will encounter outside school. The school recognises the need to extend opportunities for pupils to appreciate the diversity of cultures beyond the school and immediate community.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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|--|---|
| Pupils' attainment ¹ | 3 |
| The quality of pupils' learning and their progress | 2 |
| The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress | 2 |

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

| | |
|---|---|
| How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning? | 2 |
| To what extent do pupils feel safe? | 2 |
| How well do pupils behave? | 2 |
| To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles? | 2 |
| To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community? | 2 |
| Pupils' attendance ¹ | 3 |
| How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being? | 2 |
| What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development? | 2 |

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good. Some outstanding practice was seen in each key stage, although teaching is strongest in the Early Years Foundation Stage and upper Key Stage 2. At its best teaching generates enthusiasm, involves pupils in activities that capture and retain their interest, and meets the needs of all pupils in the group well. Less effective practice arose as a result of weaknesses in planning or where competent teachers were not as confident with subject knowledge. In these lessons pupils made satisfactory rather than good progress.

Teachers use a range of assessment strategies effectively to check for learning and modify their teaching where necessary to ensure all pupils understand the work. Regular monitoring of pupils' progress helps teachers identify underachievement and target appropriate support. Current tracking information shows that the school is on track to surpass its targets set for 2009. Pupils work is regularly marked and where the quality of feedback is good children are shown how to correct their mistakes.

The curriculum stimulates pupils' interest. Year 3 and 4 pupils were excited about their trip to a Roman fort and the Early Years Foundation Stage children enjoyed an outing and a picnic. All 7 to 9 year-olds have the opportunity to play a brass instrument. Sport and art feature prominently. Pupils say they enjoy science because of the exciting activities. An excellent programme of after school clubs, activities and visits, together with opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility, provide a rich and varied experience.

The school's work with families and children and a range of agencies to support the development and well-being of pupils is outstanding. The work the school does in easing the youngest children's transition into the Nursery and older pupils into secondary school is exceptional.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| The quality of teaching | 2 |
| The use of assessment to support learning | 2 |
| The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships | 2 |
| The effectiveness of care, guidance and support | 1 |

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher is the driving force in this school. His leadership gives a clear direction to improvement work and the actions he takes have won the confidence of staff and parents. Since the last inspection, leaders and managers have consolidated their achievements, secured further improvement and identified appropriate actions for the future. The school is aware of the challenge faced by teachers in managing the learning needs of mixed-age, mixed-ability classes and keeps this under careful review. Successful action to improve standards is reflected in the 2008 examination results, current assessment information and the good progress pupils make in lessons.

Governors discuss proposed changes in detail in order to be assured that the actions planned by senior leaders are the right ones. Regular monitoring of pupils' progress towards their targets shows that improvement has been sustained. Senior staff have adjusted targets to reflect the gains made by many pupils during this school year and ensure they continue to be challenging.

Through their actions governors demonstrate a strong commitment to equality and take steps to ensure no child is left out of the additional activities and visits. The school has appropriate plans to tackle weaknesses it has identified through self-evaluation. Insufficient rigour in monitoring and the use of the findings to develop teachers' skills across the curriculum accounts for inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.

The high priority given to pupils' well-being is evident in the school's actions to ensure their health and safety on site and during out of school activities. The outcomes of the school's policies and actions ensure that pupils are safe in school. Governors understand the need to carefully monitor compliance with all statutory requirements relating to safeguarding. There is generally a positive impact from the school's work in developing community cohesion, particularly in relation to the school and local communities.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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| The effectiveness of leadership and management in communicating ambition and driving improvement | 2 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination | 2 |
| The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers | 1 |
| The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being | 1 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion | 3 |
| The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money | 2 |

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make a rapid start in a stimulating, exceptionally rich and welcoming environment. They settle cheerfully and with a smile because of the high quality of care and support they receive from staff. Staff work tirelessly to make sure no child is left out of activities, their needs are swiftly identified and catered for so that they can learn and develop confidently. The Early Years Foundation Stage is exceptionally well led and managed.

Imaginative teaching, together with effective support, make certain that all children achieve as well as they can. This includes those who arrive or return at short notice. At the end of Reception, children have made very good progress to reach levels broadly in line with those expected for their age. Innovative use of outdoor space provides a range of opportunities tailored for children to explore, investigate and solve problems: for example, growing vegetables and plants in their garden area.

The excellent provision for personal development builds confidence and ensures that routines are correctly followed: for example, children demonstrate safe habits and consideration when riding around the street track. Behaviour is excellent. A very strong focus on speaking and listening helps children's thinking and understanding. They celebrate differences which introduces children to life in a diverse world.

Regular observations and assessments by staff are shared with parents and added to so that all are aware of the next steps in their children's learning. This reflects the excellent relationships with parents, confirmed by the overwhelmingly positive comments in questionnaires.

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| Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 1 |
| The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 1 |
| The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 1 |
| Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 1 |

Views of parents and carers

In their responses to the questionnaires, the overwhelming majority of parents and carers were very positive about the school and its impact on their children's learning and well-being. The Nursery received exceptionally high praise. Parents particularly appreciate the high quality of care that the school provides, the range of additional activities, including visits, and the school's efforts to engage with parents and keep them well-informed. In conversations with inspectors at the start of the school day, many parents and carers commented on their confidence in the headteacher and his willingness to engage with them. They clearly value the impact that staff have on their children's enjoyment of school. Overall, parents' and carers' views reflect the inspection findings.

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thirsk Community Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the

school. If a parent has more than one child at the school, we ask them to record an answer against all the questions, for each of their children.

The inspection team received 90 completed questionnaires. In total, there are 290 parents and carers registered at the school.

| | Always | Most of the time | Occasionally | Never |
|--|--------|------------------|--------------|-------|
| Overall I am happy with my child's experience at this school | 77 | 12 | 1 | 0 |

What inspection judgements mean

| Grade | Judgement | Description |
|---------|--------------|---|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding. |
| Grade 2 | Good | These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good. |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory | These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory. |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate | These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate. |

Common terminology used by inspectors

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| Attainment: | the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. |
| Progress: | the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started. |
| Achievement: | the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health. |
| Capacity to improve: | the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement. |
| Leadership and management: | the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school. |



11 June 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Thirsk Community Primary School, Thirsk, YO7 1SL

Thank you for being so welcoming when we came to inspect your school last week. We enjoyed meeting you very much indeed. We judged that yours is a good school and your headteacher and everyone who teaches and works with you is doing a good job. I am sure you know this already. Certainly, the majority of your parents said the same. These were the things we liked the most about your school.

- Your school cares for you very well. You told us you enjoy school and feel safe there. Like you, your parents and carers think that all the staff do a very good job.
- Your teachers plan interesting lessons that help you make good progress in your learning.
- You respect one another and work well together.
- We were impressed by the confident and polite way many of you spoke with us.
- Your headteacher and other leaders know what needs to be done to make your school an even better place!

To help school become even better, we have said that senior leaders should:

- make sure that lessons give some of you the chance to have a go at more difficult tasks so that you can test how much you have learned
- plan more activities that use the interactive whiteboards to help you to learn
- give you more opportunities to think about the different lives and beliefs of other people in Britain and around the world
- check that all the things they do to help make school even better really do make a difference.

Thank you again for talking to us about your school and your work.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Kirby
Her Majesty's Inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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