

Tithe Farm Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109585
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	337325
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Alan Jarvis

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	191
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Goodchild
Headteacher	Shelah Surgey
Date of previous school inspection	25 January 2007
School address	Tithe Farm Road Houghton Regis Bedfordshire
Telephone number	01582 865047
Fax number	01582 865057
Email address	Tithefarmlower@schools.bedfordshire.gov.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed seven teachers in 14 classroom visits. Meetings were held with governors, the headteacher and a number of staff responsible for key areas of the school's work. Inspectors looked at planning, minutes of meetings, other documentation including that relating to safeguarding, pupils' learning and progress records. Several informal discussions were held with parents. Questionnaires returned by 24 parents and carers, 48 pupils and eight members of staff were analysed.

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

- how well pupils across the school progress in writing and mathematics
- the impact of the care and support given to the increasing numbers of pupils who find themselves in vulnerable circumstances
- how well teaching and the curriculum is tailored to spur pupils' learning and personal development
- the extent to which the senior leadership team and governors have improved their effectiveness.

Information about the school

Most pupils live on the local housing estate where the school is situated and are of White British heritage. The proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds is smaller than average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is much higher than normal. Around one half of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities which is very high compared with most schools. The most common needs are behavioural, emotional or social problems or speech and language difficulties. The number of pupils who join or leave during the school year is higher than average. Older children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught full-time in a Reception class; younger children attend part-time in the Nursery. The school offers a breakfast club.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

All groups of pupils thrive in their learning and personal development in this good and improving school. The vast majority of parents and carers speak highly of the school with one writing, 'My daughter is very confident now and enjoys learning. The teachers are patient, spend time with her and encourage her with lots of praise'. The school cares for its pupils well. This is especially the case for those pupils whose families face challenging circumstances where the support given enables them to be happy at school and take full advantage of all it has to offer.

Attainment is on an upward trend. From a below average starting point, children make a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and start Year 1 as confident learners. Attainment in reading is above national expectations in Year 4 while that in writing and mathematics is in line. The school is ambitious to further raise attainment in writing and mathematics to match that in reading.

At the heart of the good progress all groups of pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics, is the effective teaching and an interesting and enjoyable curriculum. Both have been considerably improved since the last inspection because of good staff training, improved use of assessment to match learning to pupils' needs and effective monitoring of provision to ensure consistency in all years. There are several factors limiting attainment in writing and mathematics. While lesson activities are well tailored to the different ability groups they are not fully personalised to ensure individuals are working to the maximum extent of their capabilities. Some opportunities are missed to help pupils develop their problem solving and reasoning skills in mathematics. While there are many good examples of pupils using their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects the links are not fully embedded.

Pupils rightly say they feel very safe in school. They have the confidence to know that any problems shared with adults will be quickly sorted out. Pupils proudly and successfully take on a range of responsibilities throughout the school, cooperate well and enjoy all aspects of school life. Pupils know and choose the right things to eat. The good provision for physical education and enrichment activities means that the pupils know well what constitutes a healthy lifestyle from the time they start Nursery. Their good behaviour and keenness to learn contributes to their good progress and generates a calm and purposeful learning atmosphere in classrooms.

The governors, headteacher and leaders and managers at all levels work as an effective team and self evaluation is good. Development planning is of a good quality and improvements are prioritised and seen through with rigour. The good attention given to addressing the development points raised at the last inspection, the enhancements

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made to all areas of provision and the improved overall effectiveness of the school clearly demonstrate the good capacity for further improvement. The governing body support the school well and provide a cutting edge by challenging the school whenever necessary. Their contribution to developing community cohesion is well developed in the school and locally. It is more limited beyond this and there are few links with schools in different locations. This is reflected in pupils' limited knowledge and understanding of how people from other backgrounds and faiths lead their lives in other parts of the United Kingdom.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further raise levels of attainment in writing and mathematics so they are regularly above average by:
 - using assessment information more rigorously to provide pupils with activities personalised to their individual needs
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their problem solving skills in mathematics
 - forging stronger links between literacy, numeracy and other subjects.
- Within the next year develop pupils' understanding of cultural diversity in the United Kingdom by:
 - providing more opportunities in assemblies and the curriculum for pupils to learn about the cultures and beliefs of people who live different lives
 - actively seek a link with a school in a contrasting location.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

National assessments at the end of Year 2 show that attainment has risen steadily and securely over the past four years. Attainment has also been rising in Year 4. Attainment in reading is a strength in all years because of the introduction of a new reading scheme, which fully engages pupils, and stronger links between home and school reading. Writing shows most improvement because of the higher priority given to pupils' understanding of the link between letters and sounds. In mathematics attainment has been more static. Inspection evidence indicates there are signs of improvement as a result of more problem solving activities being provided.

Lesson observations, the schools tracking data and work in pupils' books confirm all groups of pupils, including those with a range of additional learning needs, make good progress in each year. For example, in mathematics, Year 4 pupils explored a mathematical problem with gusto. The higher attaining pupils worked at a good pace, co-operatively and independently, while the middle and lower attaining pupils were also enthused by their learning and well supported by adults. Across classes pupils waste little time, are keen to learn and give of their best and consistently work at a good pace. Pupils who join part way through the school year settle in well, quickly adapt to the class routines and make the same good progress as others.

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Assemblies and the encouragement for pupils to reflect on their experiences enables them to have a good sense of right and wrong and help new pupils settle in very well no matter what their background. While pupils have a good voice in the school, through the school council, there are sometimes missed opportunities to gather pupils' views about specific matters such as the interests they would like to pursue in the curriculum. Pupils engage enthusiastically in many sporting activities. When asked why it was important to eat well and take exercise they replied, 'to give you everything you need to fight disease and grow well'. However, their limited first hand experiences of the beliefs and lifestyles of other people means they have a less well developed appreciation of cultures other than their own. The levels of pupils' basic skills and their average attendance means they are soundly prepared for their next stage of education.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers meet the needs of the different abilities in their classes well through good planning. On occasions, some teachers target their questioning and target individual pupils with additional activities to ensure work is highly challenging. Pupils with

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

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behavioural needs are managed very well and they are rarely off task. Classroom routines are very clear. For example, in daily literacy and numeracy lessons the pupils routinely cut out and stick into their books 'What we are learning today,' which provides them with a very clear understanding of what to do. High expectations of behaviour are set and the pupils respond well so that little time is wasted in learning. The simple but very useful system of highlighting work in 'tickled' pink or 'green for growth' works well and helps pupils understand what they need to do to improve. However, growth points are not always followed up in later lessons.

The curriculum has improved because opportunities to use information and communication technology have increased and great care is taken to provide activities which stimulate, engage and interest pupils. For example, in one lesson pupils were filming a dream they had imagined in a previous lesson before editing this on a computer. The curriculum is enriched well with a wide range of visits, visitors and extra curricular activities. Pupils especially like the cheerleading, the choir and the robotic dancing group who have the opportunity to compete in international competitions. Good links between literacy, numeracy and other subjects, although not fully embedded, could be seen in the care with which pupils had used symmetry, computer generated art and writing in their topic work about Van Gogh's famous 'Starry Night' painting.

Pupils rightly say the school is a safe and happy place. Levels of pastoral support are very good because staff listen to pupils' concerns and treat them as individuals. The school can point to many striking examples of how it has supported its pupils from vulnerable circumstances and enabled them to make good progress in learning and also develop well as individuals. The popular breakfast club offer pupils a healthy meal and a secure, calm and supportive start to the school day where any worries are carefully listened to and resolved. Steps to improve the average attendance are improving but are not yet fully effective in addressing the persistent absence of a few pupils.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: 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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Good steps have been taken to strengthen the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels. The strong impact of this is seen in the good enhancement in every aspect of provision and the consequent improvement in pupils' achievement and personal development. Leaders' monitoring of lessons, planning and pupil's work is especially good. This enables best practice to be shared and provides leaders with an

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accurate picture of strengths and where improvement is needed.

Pupils, no matter what their background or level of need, are given equal opportunity to learn and thrive as is evident from the sustained improvement of all groups and the absence of discrimination. Parents and carers are well informed through a regular newsletter and the good quality reports they receive. The school is also seeking ways of extending out to the few families with whom they have little contact. Their views are regularly sought and these have helped the school improve the curriculum, change the school uniform and provide them with support and guidance to help them support their children's learning at home.

Good quality training and regular focused visits to check on how planned improvements are proceeding have significantly improved the effectiveness of the governing body. They are fully involved in helping to draw up the school development plan and providing effective strategic direction. Safeguarding arrangements meet legal requirements, staff are vetted well and effective links with outside agencies ensure any pupils potentially at risk are well supported. Governors are focused on doing even more to update essential safeguarding policies so that they reflect current best practice and guidance. Governors have developed a sound plan to develop community cohesion. The school is at an early stage of developing links beyond the local community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
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

Good leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage have secured year by year improvements in provision and outcomes. Children enter Nursery with skills

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that are below those usual for their age, particularly in language and communication, and aspects of personal and social development. Strong links with parents and carers ensure that children quickly settle in when they join and become confident learners. By the end of Reception most are approaching the expected levels although writing, calculating and shape and measure are a little weaker. A robust action plan, which includes a stronger focus on letters and sounds and more mathematical problem solving, is addressing this.

Children's behaviour is good and positive relationships help them to feel confident and safe. They are very well cared for, and policies and procedures are followed consistently. Good teaching and well planned activities, many of which children can choose for themselves, ensure they make good progress in all areas of learning. Both the Nursery and Reception provide a stimulating indoor environment which promotes learning and personal development well. For example, children thoroughly enjoy opportunities to programme the 'Beebot' or to write a diary for Alfie Bear. However, the outside area in Reception is not as highly developed which limits opportunities for a free flow of activities. The school are aware of this and do their utmost to ensure this does not impact negatively on children's learning and progress. Regular assessment based on observation and recording of progress helps adults identify and tailor learning to pupils' individual needs.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents and carers who returned questionnaires are happy with the school. They are especially pleased with how well the school is led and managed and the progress their children are making. One parent, for example wrote, 'I am very pleased and happy that my daughter is at Tithe Farm School'. There were a few negative responses relating to some areas surveyed, but the inspectors found the school to be good in nearly all aspects of its work.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Tithe Farm Lower School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 24 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 205 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	16	67	8	33	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	16	67	8	33	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	10	42	12	50	1	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	15	63	9	38	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	12	50	12	50	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	13	54	9	38	1	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	12	50	12	50	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	12	50	10	42	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	13	54	10	42	1	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	46	11	46	0	0	1	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	42	11	46	2	8	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	14	58	10	42	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	15	63	9	38	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



21 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Tithe Farm Lower School, Houghton Regis, LU5 5JB

Thank you for making us so welcome to your school. We enjoyed talking with you, looking at your work and seeing you learning in your classes. We found out that you go to a good school and here is a list of some of the things we liked best.

Children in the Nursery and Reception make a good start so that the time they move to Year 1 they are confident learners.

You learn well in lessons and make good progress because you are taught well.

You do best in your reading where your attainment is above expectations.

We were impressed by your manners and good behaviour and your strong understanding of how to eat healthily and keep fit. Well done!

You enjoy and learn a lot from the interesting and exciting activities your teachers plan for you in all subjects.

All of the adults in your school make sure that you are well looked after especially those of you who need that extra bit of help and support.

Your headteacher, governors and staff have done very well to improve the school so that it is now good and are very keen to make it even better.

Every school has some things that could be improved. There are two areas we want your school to concentrate on now.

We would like your teachers to ensure that you do even better in writing and mathematics. You can help by focusing on your writing in every subject and practising your number skills as much as you can.

We would also like your headteacher to provide you with more opportunities to learn about how different people live in our country so that you can learn more about different customs and beliefs. Think about what other people can teach you and what you can tell them about the way you want to lead your lives.

I wish you great success in the future. It was a pleasure to meet you all.

Yours sincerely

Alan Jarvis

Lead inspector

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