

Glastonbury Thorn School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110400
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	337490
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Reporting inspector	Hugh Protherough

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	254
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Malcolm Dobell
Headteacher	Fiona Webb
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 18 lessons and watched every member of the staff team teaching at least once. Inspectors met with parents, governors and staff. In addition to informal conversations during lessons they held meetings with the school council and a group of Year 2 pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at documents such as the school improvement plan, curriculum and lesson planning, and the tracking of pupils' progress. Inspectors also analysed information from 152 questionnaires received from parents and carers.

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

- the progress of different groups of pupils such as boys, higher attainers and those with special educational needs
- the teaching of the school's creative curriculum including whether it motivates pupils, enables them to practise and apply core skills and raises attainment
- the extent to which leaders and managers at all levels can account for the performance of groups and individuals across the school and point to actions that have narrowed any gaps in attainment.

Information about the school

This larger-than-average school attracts pupils from a wide geographical area. It has grown in size since the last inspection and a significant number of pupils join the school at times other than the start of the school year. Pupils come from an increasingly wide range of backgrounds. About half are White British. Other sizeable groups include White Other, Asian British Indian, Chinese and Black African. Few are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, and includes pupils with autism and specific learning difficulties. Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is made in the Reception classes.

The school has recently gained the Activemark and Artsmark Gold awards.

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

Glastonbury Thorn is a popular and successful school that provides a good quality of education. Its growth in size along with a number of changes to the staff has provided some significant challenges, especially in relation to the management of pupils joining the school during term-time. The leadership team works tirelessly and effectively to address these and ensures the school vision, 'Every day getting better in every way', is shared by pupils, staff, governors, and parents and carers. As a result, many of the outstanding features outlined in the last report have been sustained. Pupil outcomes such as behaviour, knowledge of how to stay safe and keep healthy, and a strong commitment to community continue to be excellent. Arrangements for safeguarding are thorough and staff provide outstanding care for their pupils.

The results of teachers' assessments in 2009 show that overall attainment at the end of Year 2 has fallen slightly in the past three years and is broadly in line with the national average. Past differences in the attainment of boys and girls are being successfully addressed in reading and writing, but have widened in mathematics where few pupils attained the higher levels. Pupils display positive attitudes to learning and work hard in lessons. Taken overall they make good progress. The evidence from books and folders shows this is often rapid in reading and writing, but less so in mathematics.

The school's creative curriculum helps pupils to practise key skills in a variety of settings, which reinforces their learning. Planning is thorough and benefits from the high-quality teamwork that typifies every aspect of the school's provision. Teachers know their pupils well and tasks are well matched to the wide range of abilities. This includes good provision for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils have excellent relationships with their teachers and respond positively to their high expectations. Occasionally lessons lose impetus because teachers spend too long talking to pupils rather than letting them start work. Similarly, during the opening and closing of lessons, inspectors seldom observed the types of probing questions that deepen understanding and encourage extended response.

Leaders and managers at all levels have a secure view of the progress of each pupil at the school. They have identified correctly areas for improvement such as problem-solving in mathematics and can point to a successful track record of past success. Most crucially they have sustained an ethos where children thrive and parents and carers feel part of an educational partnership. There is good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in mathematics by improving pupils' problem-solving skills so that

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the more able pupils reach the higher levels of which they are capable. A good result for June 2010 would be 28% of pupils attaining Level 3.

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
 - ensuring teachers do not spend too long talking to pupils, especially at the start of lessons
 - improving the use of probing questions that deepen understanding and offer opportunities for extended discussion.
- These features should be apparent in 50% of lessons monitored in the summer term 2010.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

'I like school because I like learning', was the unequivocal response of one Year 2 pupil to the inspectors. This positive attitude is evident throughout the school as pupils of all backgrounds and abilities apply themselves diligently at work and play.

Inspectors' analysis of their books reveals some rapid progress in writing. Many pupils of higher ability including a cross-section of different ethnic groups are developing stamina for writing extendedly and have a fluent, joined script. Though the levels attained by those with special educational needs are lower, the 'wow' books show good progress towards their writing targets. Evidence from lessons shows that progress in mathematics is improving, but is less apparent in pupils' written recording.

Pupils say they feel safe, secure and valued. Behaviour is of a consistently high standard and pupils offer a friendly and courteous welcome to visitors. Observations of vulnerable pupils show they are well cared for and helped to develop independence and to play a full part in the life of the school. Pupils have an excellent appreciation of what it means to live a healthy life and talk knowledgeably about the importance of diet and exercise. They enjoy physical education lessons and many take part in the good variety of clubs provided after school. The school has worked effectively to improve attendance and punctuality is excellent. Although cultural activities feature strongly throughout the curriculum, they do not yet fully reflect the increasingly diverse backgrounds of pupils arriving at the school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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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	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The school's creative curriculum has a positive impact on learning. Teachers are adept at finding ways to engage pupils' interest by creating links between subjects. Art, music, role-play and the skilled use of new technologies at the start of lessons frequently help to bring learning alive. Practical activities such as measuring distance or volume in science experiments support the reinforcement of key mathematical skills.

Excellent attention is given to all aspects of care, guidance and support. The school provides a welcoming environment that celebrates pupils' work. Well-considered arrangements for pupils arriving midway through a term help them settle in swiftly. Effective links with parents and a range of agencies such as health and education welfare ensure prompt support for vulnerable pupils.

The teaching observed during the inspection was good. Lesson planning is detailed and incisive, catering thoughtfully for the wide range of abilities in each class. Teaching assistants play a key role and are effectively deployed to support individuals with special educational needs. Teachers' thorough approaches to assessment ensure that pupils benefit from good quality feedback on their work. This informs the regular pupil progress meetings where those falling behind are identified and targeted for the additional support that helps them to catch up.

Most lessons progress at a brisk pace, but occasionally the introductions go on for too long and pupils, though very well behaved, find it hard to sustain their concentration. The school is rightly focused upon improving provision in mathematics and an emphasis on problem-solving and talking about mathematical processes is evident in all classes. However, while teachers generally match their questions well to individual abilities, not

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all are successful in using pupils' responses to inform subsequent questions to probe and deepen understanding.

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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Staff morale is high. Leaders and managers at all levels are strongly committed to the work of the school, ensuring improvement and the best possible outcomes for pupils. Governors visit regularly and offer good challenge and support in respect of monitoring the quality of education and the use of finance. As a result, there is shared commitment to realising the priorities of the school's improvement plan.

Leaders hold a strong sense of accountability in their areas of responsibility. The inclusion leader has thorough oversight of the provision for pupils with special educational needs. She knows the story behind their assessment data, so that if a pupil appears to be falling behind she can point to the medical or emotional issues that may underpin this, as well as the action taken to help them to catch up. The support for pupils who speak English as an additional language and the narrowing gap in the achievements of girls and boys in literacy are further good examples of how the school takes concerted action to promote equality of opportunity.

The leader for mathematics has made a good start in her new role. She has an accurate view of pupils' attainment and what needs to be done to improve this. Early indications are that a school-wide focus on problem-solving is increasing pupils' enjoyment of mathematics. There has not yet been opportunity to check the quality of teaching and its impact on attainment..

The school adopts excellent approaches to all aspects of risk assessment and the safeguarding of pupils. The headteacher and staff work productively with other agencies such as health and education welfare to support the specific needs of individual pupils and their families.

The school's good understanding of its local context, and its effective links with partner schools nationally, serve to promote community cohesion well. Good plans are in place for broader international links to further develop pupils' understanding of cultural diversity.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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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	1
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children settle swiftly into school because there are highly effective induction arrangements. As a result they develop close and trusting relationships with the staff. They arrive happily with their parents each morning and show great confidence in daily routines.

Staff's planning is thorough and detailed. It ensures a good mix of adult-led and child-initiated activities. For instance, a focus on superheroes has grabbed the imagination of the children. As well as enjoying the fun of dressing up, they are making good gains in speaking and listening through role play. At the same time, an adult-led programme of work to develop children's knowledge of the sounds of letters is having a positive impact on children's early reading.

Indoors, children select equipment and resources and use them thoughtfully when directing their own work. However, they are not always so keen to tidy up. Although the outside classroom is more limited in scope, the children make good use of it because adults recognise its importance and plan appropriately. There are exciting plans for the further development of this area.

The data for last year's Reception children indicate that children made good progress from their starting points, which were slightly lower than those expected of four-year-olds, especially in speaking and listening. By the end of the year most were working securely at average standards across the areas of learning. The profile of the current cohort on entry was broadly average and strongest in problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy. Children are making good progress and most are on course to be working securely within the early learning goals by July.

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The Early Years Foundation Stage is well led and new staff members are swiftly integrated. Close teamwork ensures assessment arrangements are thorough. Individual learning journals are building a compelling picture of children's achievements across the areas of learning. These are augmented by the home-school learning books and reading notebooks which demonstrate the positive impact of the strong partnership between home and school.

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

A large proportion of parents returned their questionnaires. Inspectors agree with the overwhelmingly positive views of the school expressed by parents and in the informal conversations held during the inspection. This is especially true of the quality of teaching, the caring ethos and the effective way that pupils are supported and helped to keep safe and healthy.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Glastonbury Thorn 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 152 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 254 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	121	80	29	19	2	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	124	82	24	16	1	1	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	95	63	53	35	3	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	106	70	42	28	1	1	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	117	77	34	22	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	110	72	38	25	2	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	106	70	41	27	2	1	1	1
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)	91	60	46	30	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	97	64	46	30	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	106	70	38	25	1	1	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	95	63	52	34	1	1	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	128	84	20	13	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	126	83	24	15	1	1	1	1

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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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.



6 February 2010

Dear Children

Inspection of Glastonbury Thorn School, Milton Keynes, MK5 6AB

Thank you all for making the inspectors so welcome when we came to visit your school. This letter is to let you know what we found out.

We agree with you and your parents that Glastonbury Thorn is a wonderful place to go to school. Your teachers take great care of you and keep you safe. They give you lots of interesting things to do and make learning fun. You behave excellently in lessons and always try hard to do your best: 'Every day getting better in every way!'

We were very impressed by the work that we saw on the walls and in your books. Your paintings and collages show real flair and imagination. Some of you are developing into talented authors.

There are a couple of things we would like you all to do to make your school even better. Many of you know a lot about numbers, counting and measuring, but you also need to use this knowledge to help you solve problems. We saw that you have started to do this and we would like you to keep practising with your teachers so that you get even better.

The next thing is linked to something Year 2 told me. They said that they get stiff sitting on the carpet for too long! We agree that sometimes the teachers are so keen to share all that they know, they talk a little bit too much rather than letting you start work. We have suggested that they talk a bit less and ask questions that make you think hard to explain what you know.

With best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Hugh Protherough

Lead inspector

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