

Thurston Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124715
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	340633
Inspection dates	4–5 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Georgina Beasley

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	145
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gillian Smailes
Headteacher	Rosemary Skrimshire
Date of previous school inspection	16 January 2007
School address	School Lane Thurston Bury St Edmunds
Telephone number	01359 230444
Fax number	01359 232729
Email address	ad.thurston.p@talk21.com

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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 two additional inspectors who observed nine lessons taught by six teachers. Inspectors met with parents, groups of pupils, governors and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at teachers' planning, pupils' work, policies and procedures including those related to safeguarding. Inspectors received and analysed 113 parental questionnaires.

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

- boys' achievement in reading and writing
- the challenge for more able pupils
- how effectively the school monitors pupils' learning and progress and makes adjustments to teaching to address shortcomings
- how well the school measures its effectiveness against challenging targets for pupils' attainment and adjusts its action plans in response.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than average. Nearly all pupils are from White UK backgrounds. A smaller proportion than average has special educational needs and/or disabilities, mostly for learning difficulties. A very small number speak English as an additional language. Pupils start on a part-time basis in the Reception class in the September following their fourth birthday and attend full-time from the start of the term in which they become five. The school has Healthy Schools status. The headteacher has been absent for long periods over the last two years and was not in school during the inspection. In her absence, the school is led by the senior teacher.

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. Pupils' learning and progress are satisfactory and attainment is average. This masks the considerable teamwork demonstrated by the whole staff who have pulled together to minimise the impact of the headteacher's prolonged absence. Their commitment is recognised by pupils, governors and parents. As one parent accurately said, 'There is a great positive ethos, and caring, sensitive teachers.' The governing body gives good support to enable staff to do their job. It ensures safeguarding arrangements are robust, and consistently implemented and followed. Pupils know and follow the school's motto, 'Show that you care.' They feel safe and show good care and respect for each other. Behaviour is good and any minor fall outs are quickly sorted out. Numerous sporting clubs before and during school, swimming and the Saturday football club enrich the many other opportunities for pupils to be physically active. Nearly every pupil is involved in the very popular 'Little Diggers' lunchtime gardening club which effectively raises their understanding of the importance of eating healthily. Pupils have good skills to prepare them for transfer to middle school. Pupils understand the importance of being in school every day and on time. Attendance is above average. Pupils work constructively together on group tasks, following consistently the 'Together Everyone Achieves More' (TEAM) message.

There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. When they start in the Early Years Foundation Stage, children's skills and experiences are similar to those expected for their age. They get off to a good start in the Reception class due to good teaching and exciting learning activities. Pupils enjoy school, particularly the school's rich, relevant and interesting curriculum. The topic-based approach helps pupils apply reading, writing, numeracy and information and communication technology skills in many different subjects. However, there are fewer opportunities for them to practise and apply wider mathematics skills in the same way. Teachers and teaching assistants use assessment information well to ensure learning tasks help pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Teaching does not always focus clearly enough on what every pupil will learn. Teachers sometimes spend too long explaining tasks and so do not give pupils enough time to finish their work or ensure that more able pupils are challenged.

Despite improvements this year to attainment in reading and the curriculum, the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory. Expectations of pupils' outcomes are not sufficiently detailed in the school's action plans and, as a result, the school's leadership cannot measure with enough rigour whether improvement strategies are working. Assessment information has not been analysed in a timely manner to identify when and why pupils' progress slows and so make the required improvements to teaching.

Teachers' feedback to pupils is not always specific enough to help them make the necessary improvements to their work. Although teachers have implemented effective strategies to improve reading and writing this year, attainment in mathematics has fallen. Boys do not do as well as the girls and few reach the higher levels in writing and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure leaders check pupils' progress more systematically and give the information to teachers so that they can build and challenge pupils' learning more effectively.
- Set challenging and measurable targets for improving pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics, and monitor progress towards them more rigorously.
- Refocus teaching so that:
 - learning is clearly identified and referred to in lessons
 - pupils have enough time to practise, consolidate and extend their learning and skills
 - teachers' feedback gives pupils clear guidance about how to improve their work.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit from an Ofsted inspector before their next inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Attainment in reading is above average. It is average in writing and mathematics because some more able boys do not reach the higher levels in these subjects in Years 3 and 4. Learning and progress are satisfactory but vary across the school in different year groups and subjects. For example, there is good progress this year in mathematics and satisfactory progress in literacy in Year 3 and good progress in literacy and satisfactory progress in mathematics in Year 4. Due to the senior teacher covering the long-term absence of the headteacher, there has been a lack of continuity in teaching over the last two years and so a similar variation in learning and progress in Years 1 and 2. Pupils who do not reach expected levels in reading and writing in Years 1 and 2 are mostly boys. Achievement is satisfactory.

Learning and progress in lessons are securely satisfactory and sometimes good. They are not yet consistently good enough to raise attainment in all subjects and for all groups of pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress due to the focused support they receive for their specific needs. Pupils who speak English in addition to another language make satisfactory progress. Attainment in science and information and communication technology is above average and learning and progress in these subjects are good.

In discussion, pupils say they feel safe in school. Older pupils have a good awareness of the needs of the younger ones because they remember what it is like to be small among much taller pupils. One remarked that he often 'crouches down to get on their level so

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

they don't feel so scared'. Pupils make a good contribution to the school, village and world communities. Pupils like being class monitors and Year 4 pupils are frequent helpers around the school. The active school council raises funds and decides how to spend them, but members are not as involved as they would like in making day-to-day decisions about the school's work.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers plan interesting activities that ensure pupils enjoy their learning. A varied range of methods keep pupils motivated and help them to concentrate in lessons. In good lessons, teaching focuses clearly on what pupils are expected to learn: pupils' learning is checked regularly and adjustments made to ensure they achieve the expected outcomes. When learning is not clearly planned, teachers spend too long introducing and explaining the activity to the whole class. As a result, pupils do not always have enough time to practise their skills and complete their work to a high enough level and quality.

Teachers use day-to-day assessment information to ensure good support for pupils who

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

struggle with new learning, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teaching assistants play a pivotal role in ensuring good progress for this group of pupils. However, more able pupils are not challenged consistently, especially older boys in mathematics and writing. Pupils know their learning targets but teachers' written comments on their work do not always give them clear enough guidance about how to reach them.

The school has introduced a revised curriculum that ensures pupils enjoy learning. Interesting project-based learning is supported well by relevant visits and through strong community and global partnerships. The improved curriculum is helping pupils reach higher attainment in writing this year and the above average reading, information and communication technology and science skills. Extra-curricular clubs make a positive contribution to pupils' personal development and fitness. Effective induction procedures ensure pupils start school confidently. Extra visits to the middle school help to ensure that provision is in place for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to aid their transfer to Year 5. The school works in close partnership with, and acts upon the advice from, specialists and charities to ensure the special educational needs of pupils are met effectively.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
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?

Members of the teaching team have a strong commitment to doing the best for pupils and work together well to plan interesting activities. Strong links with the local church ensures pupils' good understanding and respect for different beliefs and cultures. Sponsorship of a girl in Africa and the study of different countries broaden pupils' understanding of life for other people in the world community. The school's promotion of pupils' equal opportunities and the way it tackles discrimination are satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have their needs met well, but more able boys are not always challenged sufficiently in some lessons and subjects. All pupils have the chance to enjoy the numerous clubs and extra-curricular activities and this is reflected in the high take up from all year groups. Parents lead some of these clubs and regularly come into school to read alongside their children.

Governors meet regularly to discuss the school's performance but until recently they have not had enough information to challenge the school as effectively as they would have wished. This has now changed and they are tackling key weaknesses with

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

determination. They are clear about the school's strengths and areas in need of improvement, and have collected parents' views to involve them more actively in improvement planning.

Some leadership tasks have not been tackled in a timely manner. Teaching is not monitored rigorously enough by evaluating its impact on pupils' learning. Targets in the school's improvement plan do not include measures of pupils' expected attainment against which the school can check the effectiveness of improvement strategies. Pupils' progress is not checked regularly enough to identify quickly any dips in performance and so initiate immediate improvements to teaching.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
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	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

The children make good progress in their learning and development due to good teaching and a rich curriculum. Most reach the expected levels by the end of the Reception year and a good number exceed these. The children make particularly good progress in their personal development and are well prepared for learning in Year 1. Some summer-born children reach lower levels than their classmates because they attend on a part-time basis for much of the year. The indoor and outdoor learning areas are well organised and cater for all interests and abilities. The focused teaching of letters and the sounds they make, and regular practise in sounding out words, result in the children starting in Year 1 with higher reading skills this year. Boys' achievement in writing remains a concern. Many boys enjoy learning because they can go outside and use a varied range of resources to act out imaginative play situations. For example, a small group of boys worked tirelessly to stop the flow of lava from an exploding volcano

reaching the classroom but, because they were so engaged, many chose not to write when such activities were offered.

Staff make careful assessments of the children's learning and effectively tackle gaps in learning. They use the information effectively to work with individuals and small groups on a particular task and to interact with learning when children choose their own activity. There is a clear improvement plan for further developing the outside area and for improving boys' writing skills.

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 response to the parents' and carers' questionnaire was high. Parents and carers are generally supportive of the school. The inspection team agrees with the great majority who expressed a view that pupils enjoy school and that the school keeps them safe. Inspectors agree that parents and carers do not always have regular or precise enough information about their children's learning and progress to enable them to give support at home. Some pupils could make faster progress. A large number of concerns were expressed about the headteacher's long absences. Inspectors agree that some leadership tasks are not being completed regularly and in a timely enough manner, particularly to give effective leadership of teaching and learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thurston Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary 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 113 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 145 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	54	48	58	51	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	49	43	64	57	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	19	17	69	61	18	16	4	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	27	65	58	14	12	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	31	27	71	63	7	6	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	26	23	78	69	6	5	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	38	34	75	66	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)	34	30	60	53	4	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	28	25	69	61	9	8	3	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	19	67	59	8	7	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	15	61	54	20	18	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	12	11	61	54	22	19	8	7
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	26	23	79	70	5	4	2	2

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.



7 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thurston Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Bury St Edmunds, IP31 3RY

Thank you for your polite and friendly welcome when I visited recently to inspect the school. Thank you in particular to those of you who took the time to tell me so much about your learning.

Your school is satisfactory because there are some things that are good and others that could be better. These are some of the good things. You all behave well and are very polite. You care a lot about each other, play well together at playtimes and learn in groups effectively. You make good progress in the Reception class and in science and information and communication technology. Teachers plan many interesting topics and visits to make learning fun. You told me that the early morning sports clubs and 'Little Diggers' gardening club are fun too. These all help you to learn how to keep fit and healthy. You enjoy coming to school and so your attendance is good. You settle down to work very quickly every morning. Well done.

Here are some of the things that need to be improved. Many of you could make better progress in reading, writing and mathematics so that you are well prepared for your next class and your move to middle school. We have asked the school's leaders to do the following things to help bring this about.

Check your progress more regularly and give the information to your teachers so that they can make sure that teaching is just right to help you learn well.

Set precise targets for you to reach in your reading, writing and mathematics at the end of each year and then check to make sure you are reaching them.

Help teachers to identify more clearly what they want you to learn in lessons and then give you enough time and guidance to help you finish your work to a high enough level and quality.

You can help by knowing your targets and then making sure you do what you need to do to reach them.

Yours sincerely

Georgina Beasley

Lead inspector

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