

Thorndon Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124745
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	340644
Inspection dates	5–6 November 2009
Reporting inspector	John Mason

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	44
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Wendy Coulson
Headteacher	Mr Stephen Robbins
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2007
School address	The Street Thorndon Eye
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited four lessons, dropped into other lessons and held meetings with governors, staff groups of pupils and parents. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of policies, reviews by the local authority, governors' minutes, the school's development plan, curricular planning and 22 parental questionnaires.

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

- recent and current rates of learning and progress in the school
- the extent to which new management structures have had an impact on improving provision and raising standards in teaching and learning
- the extent to which pupil's personal development is a strength of the school.

Information about the school

Thorndon Primary is a very small school which serves three small villages. Most cohorts comprise less than ten pupils and therefore pupils of different ages are always taught together. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is similar to other schools. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has risen in recent years and is now above average. The school holds Healthy School accreditation.

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Thorndon Primary School provides a good education for its pupils. It is a very happy school with a strong sense of community. Pupils of all ages mix very well with one another and their relationships with teachers, support staff or parent helpers are trusting and heartfelt. Behaviour and pupils' respect for others are outstanding. The whole community takes considerable pride in the school and its achievements. 'The teachers know the children so well', writes one parent typically. 'There is a wonderful sense of belonging: they appreciate qualities in each other irrespective of what age they are or class they are in'.

Standards have improved since changes to the management and staffing structure were introduced last year. Teachers' tracking and inspection evidence indicate that standards of work of the current Year 6 are now above average, despite the pattern of results for Year 6 leavers in the last three years indicating average attainment. From broadly average starting points, pupils make good progress in their learning in all key areas of the curriculum.

Under the new arrangements, the headteacher holds a part-time post. He has relinquished most of his teaching to another colleague and is now able to focus more effectively on driving improvement. Older pupils gain greater consistency of provision and this, too, is driving up standards. Governors and the local authority have monitored this rather exceptional arrangement and concur with this view.

Teaching is good. Learning is improving because staff are now assessing and tracking pupils' progress more accurately and more regularly. As a result, staff are better able to support individuals in overcoming any weaknesses in their learning and areas for whole-school focus are better identified. However, while tracking in literacy is established across the school, it is only used in upper years in mathematics. More formal monitoring of lessons is helping teachers to reflect on their practice and develop greater consistency between different classes and subjects. However, this practice is at an early stage in development and is only beginning to focus on the quality of pupils' learning.

Careful deployment of staff whose skills complement each other very well, effective linked activities with neighbouring primary schools and a range of very successful out-of-hours activities ensure pupils enjoy a good, wide-ranging curriculum. However, continuity in learning for some year groups is limited as they have a greater number of part-time staff than others. Opportunities for children to learn through self-initiated play in the Early Years Foundation Stage are limited by the children sharing lessons, teachers and facilities with Key Stage 1.

While having emerging strengths, the effectiveness of the leadership and the school's

capacity to improve are both satisfactory. The headteacher and governors take a strong lead in engaging parents and carers very well into school life, a particular strength in the good care, guidance and support of pupils. However, they have not been thorough enough in ensuring that all required policies and training are reviewed on a regular enough basis to meet fully all statutory requirements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Consolidate the quality of assessment, tracking and monitoring of pupils' learning to facilitate a more cohesive approach to further raising standards in core subjects.
 - Ensure all policies are monitored and reviewed within prescribed time frames in order to better influence school planning and meet fully statutory requirements.
 - Improve children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage by providing greater opportunity for child-initiated learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

When pupils start in the Reception Class they have the broad skills and abilities expected for their age. They make good progress in their personal and social development, but still enter Year 1 with average attainment overall because they do not make such good progress in aspects of literacy and mathematical development. They continue to make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 1, reaching average standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 2. This is supported by inspectors' observations, including those of well-presented books. Accurate and rigorous tracking in reading, writing and mathematics indicates that many of the current Year 6 pupils are already working at expected or higher levels for their age. Pupils in Year 5, whose performance in Year 2 was below average, are also making good progress, as are pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Pupils greatly enjoy coming to school. They particularly appreciate the opportunities they have in arts and sport to enhance their learning experiences and to develop their physical fitness. They are proud and appreciative of the varied, colourful and high quality displays throughout the school. Pupils further adopt excellent healthy practice in their knowledgeable and considered approach to diet. For example, at lunch, they make informed choices and do not rush their food. Many parents report positively on the effect that pupils' outstanding behaviour and good safe practices has on the emotional health of those pupils with difficulties which might otherwise hinder their social inclusion. Most pupils become involved in activities and events organised by the school and by governors. The lively choir and active gardening club members, for example, are regularly involved in Church activities or the annual Thorndon Leek Club show. The school council makes important decisions to improve the school. Pupils respond particularly well to the Christian values the school promotes. They are curious about the world around them, reflective and show great social responsibility, both in their interaction with peers and in supporting charitable appeals for those in need elsewhere. Pupils take a keen interest in developing their skills in information and communications

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

technology, helping them also to develop skills needed for the next stage in their education well. Attendance is average.

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	2
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	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have good subject knowledge and communicate this well through their confident interaction with pupils. All adults know each pupil very well, making for very good classroom management and an excellent environment for learning where excellent behaviour and respect for adults contributes well to pupil's concentration and learning. Teachers make clear what the class is expected to do in each lesson, but are not always explicit about what different groups are expected to achieve which would help pupils think more for themselves about their learning. Regular assessment, including good developing practice in peer and self-assessment, and tracking of pupils' work is helping to improve standards in writing and mathematics with closer tailoring of work to ability. This is especially so in Year 5 and 6, but the practice is not yet consistently established across all classes or all core subjects. Written work is usually well marked with helpful indications as to how to improve. Teaching assistants are used well to support learning

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

for pupils with identified needs or those targeted for special support.

An adroit balance of teachers' specialisms and collaborations with other local schools enables the school to offer breadth and depth in the curriculum. The continuity of learning is, however, limited by an over-reliance on part-time teachers for some year-groups, with the result that core skills may go unconsolidated for half a week at a time. Planning of topic and other cross-curricular work, while stimulating great interest, does not consistently address this. Good provision for personal, social and health education enhances pupils' moral and social development. Visits to places of interest enliven learning in humanities and science. Trips to non-Christian places of worship go some way to helping pupils gain an appreciation of other cultures and faiths represented in the wider society.

New pupils blend very well into the close-knit school community. Good links with external agencies ensure that provision to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. The many joint activities with local primary and high schools do much to allay pupils' anxieties about moving to a large secondary school. Although the school's high level of care promotes some outstanding outcomes in personal development, the school's ability to give guidance based on accurate tracking is still developing and some policies and training have not always been renewed within expected time scales.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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?

The experienced, long-serving headteacher has a clear overview of his school. He involves staff and governors in the evaluation of provision, utilising their strengths well. For example, governors with the support of the strong parents' association have raised sizeable sums to extend facilities. Staff feel they have a good voice in the development of the school. Over many years, positive and enduring partnerships with parents and carers, the local authority, the Church and a range of local institutions have been established, greatly enhancing provision and opportunity for the pupils. Effective reporting to parents and carers is regular and home-school diaries are used well to involve families in their children's learning. The school's priorities for development are appropriate and increasingly informed by the greater rigour which is now emerging in reviewing the quality of teaching and learning. Governors have a good range of critical and supportive skills and show a high level of commitment to school development.

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

However, they have not given high enough priority to ensuring all policies are robust and regularly reviewed. For example, despite the school's great cohesiveness as a community, there are gaps in the planning to develop aspects of national and global citizenship. Similarly, while children in the school mix and support each other so well, formal guidelines to staff on tackling discrimination are in parts quite sketchy. The effectiveness of procedures for safeguarding children is satisfactory.

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	3
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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

At the time of the inspection, only three children were in the Reception Year. They are taught together with all Key Stage 1 pupils. This arrangement limits the children's opportunity to move freely between the indoor and outdoor areas and to initiate their own activities without disrupting the more formal learning of the older pupils. As a result, there is more adult-led activity than normal in an early years setting. This imbalance makes it harder to assess accurately the stage in the children's development, and limits the quality of teachers' planning. However, because they are able to socialise well and work alongside older children, the children make good progress in their social and emotional development and in their physical and creative development. Although progress is not as rapid in aspects of literacy and numeracy, most children write their name accurately, count and order numbers up to 10 accurately. Some are beginning to succeed at elementary calculation games. Teaching and planning are satisfactory. The management and overall provision of the Early Years Foundation Stage are also satisfactory.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers indicate a very high level of approval for the education their children receive. They express no significant concerns and provide many anecdotes of how effectively the school has helped children integrate into school life and make the most of the education it offers. Inspectors broadly concur with their views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thorndon 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 22 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 44 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	16	73	6	27	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	16	73	6	27	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	14	64	7	32	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	55	10	45	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	13	59	9	41	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	15	68	7	32	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	16	73	6	27	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)	13	59	7	32	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	12	55	9	41	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	55	9	41	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	64	8	36	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	12	55	9	41	1	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	15	68	7	32	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 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.



9 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thorndon Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School,
Thorndon, IP23 7RJ

Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming when the two inspectors recently visited school. We enjoyed talking to you and observing you at work and at play. Please also thank your parents for kindly completing the questionnaires.

Your parents clearly think that Thorndon Primary is a good school and we do, too. It is easy to understand why you enjoy school so much. You all get on so well with one another. The displays of your varied and exciting art work, the excitement that topic work generates, and the enthusiasm with which you all sing together, underline your enjoyment of school. Your questionnaires told us how well you think your teachers care for you and help you to learn.

Some of you will recall that the arrangements for teaching Key Stage 2 pupils changed last year. This has helped you to learn better and make more progress. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 now get greater continuity in their teaching and the arrangement has helped the school to introduce better ways to assess your work. This is helping you to know better what you must do to improve and helping the teachers to plan better, too. Until recently, pupils were making satisfactory progress, but now your progress is good and Year 6 pupils look set to reach above average standards in the tests at the end of the year. We agree with Mr Robbins that teaching is good and that, with all the extra activities organised with other schools and out-of-hours, you have a good range of opportunities to help you learn.

For all this, we say that management of the school is satisfactory because some important organisational details had been overlooked by the headteacher and the governors. To further improve your education we are asking the school to do the following:

Monitor your progress in all subjects as well as is now the case in English, so that teachers can plan for you to do even better.

Make sure that all school planning policies are up to date.

Enable the children in the Reception Year to make more decisions for themselves when they learn and play.

Yours faithfully

John Mason, Lead Inspector

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