

Thatcham Park C of E Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135080
Local Authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	341611
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Rodney Braithwaite

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	345
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Benton
Headteacher	Mrs Marilyn Cornwell
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors spent three quarters of their time examining the learning of pupils. They visited 26 lessons and held meetings with groups of pupils, staff and governors. They had two telephone conversations with governors. They observed the school's work and looked at documentation relating to the safeguarding of pupils, the school's self-evaluation, and the assessment and tracking of pupils' progress. Inspectors looked at pupils' work, the school improvement plan and the school budget. They analysed the responses of 133 questionnaires completed by parents and carers.

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

- attainment and achievement of pupils in Years 3 to 6, and their rates of progress in their learning
- the effectiveness of teaching in improving the learning of more able pupils, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and boys in Years 1 and 2
- the capability of school management and the governing body to lead consistent improvement over time
- the financial management of the school, and the effectiveness of long-term school budget planning.

Information about the school

This primary school is larger than average. Most pupils are of White British background. There are a number of minority ethnic groups, the largest being of Bangladeshi origin. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than average, the largest group being pupils who have speech and language difficulties. Six pupils have a statement of special educational needs. A small but growing number of pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The school makes provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in its Reception and Nursery classes. The school has a number of awards including Artsmark and the Healthy School award. The deputy headteacher was new to the school in September 2009.

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

This is a good school which is demonstrating a strong capacity to continue the good improvement made since amalgamation four years ago. This is because attainment is improving, there is a better management structure, most teaching offers consistent challenge to pupils, and provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. Consequently all groups of pupils are achieving well. An enthusiastic staff team, led sensitively and determinedly by the ambitious headteacher, provides a high standard of care and guidance for the needs of all pupils, especially the most vulnerable. The school's evaluation of its own performance is positive and almost always accurate. The school has an exceptionally positive partnership with parents and carers, who are proud of the school and what it offers to their children. Typically one commented, 'This is a truly lovely school run by an excellent team who are always approachable.'

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress in their learning and development. This continues in all years so that by the end of Year 6, attainment overall is now at least in line with national averages, which is an improvement on recent years. The school's introduction of new assessment strategies has contributed greatly to teachers' understanding of their pupils' learning. While teaching is much improved, especially for specifically targeted groups of pupils, insufficient emphasis is given to encouraging pupils' independent learning and use of their own initiative. Pupils tend to rely on teachers' evaluation of their learning rather than evaluating it themselves. Occasionally teachers are overlong in their introductions to learning activities. A varied and enjoyable curriculum is helping pupils to reach above-average attainment in art and information and communication technology.

A strength of the school is its friendly and enthusiastic pupils who have excellent attitudes to learning and behave very well in and out of school. They enjoy their learning and have very good relationships with all staff. Their involvement in the school and local community is good, but their learning about national and international communities is less well developed. The development of pupils' spiritual, moral and social skills is good and is evident daily in the life of the school.

In spite of recent changes, the governing body continues to make a good contribution to the management of the school. A core of experienced governors ensures that all statutory responsibilities, especially in safeguarding, are fully met, and at all times governors challenge and support school leaders.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Maintain the recent improvement in attainment in English and mathematics throughout the school by:
 - giving pupils more opportunities to develop independent learning and research skills
 - teachers offering more effective guidance to pupils about how to evaluate their own progress in learning, and about using their own initiative
 - ensuring that in lessons pupils are consistently able to move quickly on to individual and group learning activities where appropriate.

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

Pupils respond best to stimulating and challenging teaching when they have to use their own initiative and research skills. During the inspection this was seen to very good effect in a Year 2 class when pupils were trying to find out the properties of metals. Learning also took place rapidly in a Year 3/4 class when pupils wrote excitingly, accurately and at length about their recent experiences in the snow. However, these aspects of learning are not yet developed consistently across the whole school. The school has concentrated successfully on raising the attainment of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and they are making good progress. Attainment has been rising steadily in Years 1 to 3 and is now at least in line with national expectations. This indicates good achievement as most children enter the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage with low-level academic and personal skills. The school is also now ensuring that boys in their early years are making better progress, because their learning is more suited to their needs and interests. The attainment of pupils in Years 3 to 6 has been disappointing since the school first opened. However, more accurate assessment and better teaching are leading to a marked improvement in learning and progress throughout these years. The writing skills of pupils have developed strongly, and although standards in mathematics have not improved quite as quickly, new strategies are already firmly in place, and improvement in Years 5 and 6 especially is very evident in pupils' books. Pupils clearly take a pride in their work, which is mostly neat and well presented.

Very good relationships between staff and pupils contribute strongly to the good attitudes to learning of pupils, and to their clear enjoyment of school. This was summed up by the pupil who wrote, 'What I like about school is if I'm upset when I get there my teacher cares about me, and always thinks of something to make me happy.' Pupils feel very safe in school and follow safe practices, and are confident that staff keep them free from bullying or harassment. Mutual respect means that their behaviour is good and sometimes, as during the inspection, excellent. Pupils know about and subscribe positively to the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and appreciate their many opportunities for games and sports clubs. Many walk or cycle to school. Most express strong approval of their activities in music, dance, art and ecology through their work in the gardening club. Drama is especially popular: 'I liked doing our Christmas show, Songs of Distant Earth, although I was sceptical at first.' Pupils enjoy being given responsibilities and making contributions to charity and the local community. Attendance is satisfactory, and

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much improved on the past. Although pupils have the personal skills and qualities needed for their future, they are not yet receiving sufficient opportunities to take initiatives and develop independence.

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?

Teaching and learning are consistently good. Teachers have very good relationships with their pupils, and greatly improved assessment procedures are helping them to have a better understanding of the needs of every pupil. This is particularly so with groups of pupils such as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, more able pupils and boys, where there have been weaknesses in the past. Their learning is much improved and continues to accelerate. Lessons are well managed, mostly challenging and lively, and enhanced by pupils' commendable attitudes to learning. Planning is good, and there is effective use of setting and grouping to encourage learning, and a consistent approach to marking and target setting. Teachers work effectively with very competent teaching assistants who are often involved in intervention activities with pupils most in need of support. Occasionally though, pupils sit for too long listening to

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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teachers when they could be pressing ahead with their own activities. Teachers sometimes tend to direct pupils too much. Consequently they are not yet developing higher-level skills in their independent learning and research, or playing a bigger part in the evaluation of their own learning.

The school provides a creative and imaginative curriculum. Resources are varied and of good quality, especially books and computers. The school makes excellent use of both outside and in-house expertise, for example, to provide a suitable curriculum for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils appreciate the opportunities they have in music through partnership with local music initiatives, in dance and in learning foreign languages. A wide range of extra-curricular activities, clubs and visits are popular and well attended. Some high quality displays of pupils' work show the extent of the curriculum, especially in art, but these are mostly in public areas rather than in pupils' own classrooms. The school makes good provision for information and communication technology and is improving the use of English and mathematics across the curriculum.

The school provides a caring and welcoming environment for all pupils. Links with many outside agencies are effective and the school works very closely with the most vulnerable pupils and their families. Provision for child protection, risk assessment and health and safety is fully in place and reviewed regularly. Provision for dealing with attendance issues is thorough. Arrangements for transition of pupils into Year 1, and for their secondary education, are good and enable pupils to have confidence in their future.

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?

The headteacher has given an effective lead to staff over the difficult years of amalgamation. As a result, all share her ambition for a continually improving school now that the foundations are firmly in place. This has helped the school to become strongly inclusive, where the needs of all pupils are known and provided for. Teachers and teaching assistants make a mutually supportive and motivated team, and senior leaders under the sensitive direction of the head are developing good management and monitoring skills. This has led to improvement in many areas of the school, notably in the good progress now being made by almost all pupils, as a result of much-improved teaching, and signals a good capacity for further improvement. There have been a

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number of changes recently to the governing body. However, this has in no way impaired the effectiveness of governors in both challenging and supporting the school. Existing governors have ensured a smooth integration of new recruits. This has meant that high standards of safeguarding and other statutory procedures have been maintained and improved. The school also successfully promotes equality of opportunity as no group of pupils is disadvantaged in their work.

Parents and carers are regularly consulted and are encouraged to play a full part in the learning and personal development of their children. A significant number of parents and carers are involved with the very successful parents' association, which has raised substantial sums of money for the school. This is particularly helpful as the school has had difficulties with the budget since the end of the protected budget element following amalgamation. Evidence now suggests that the school, with the guidance of governors and the help of the local authority, will be able to overcome any shortfall in the future. The school's contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory, and the development of links nationally and globally is steadily growing.

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	2
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

The majority of children enter the Nursery with skill levels well below those expected for their age. In both the Nursery and Reception classes, children make good progress in all areas of learning and enter Year 1 with skill levels only slightly below those expected for their age. This is because they learn in a calm, purposeful environment which leads to very good relationships and behaviour, and happy children. They are well supported in

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their development by teachers and their assistants, who ensure that great attention is paid to the individual needs of all children. Adults are flexible in their provision of exciting learning opportunities, exemplified by the fascinating activities they devised for children to enjoy in the snow during the inspection. Very good provision is made for the safeguarding of children and the promotion of their welfare and well-being. The enthusiastic team of adults is well managed and led, and this is particularly evident in the good use of assessment and recording for individual children throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage. The classes are well resourced both indoors and outside, and a varied range of activities promote language and creativity well. Self-evaluation is accurate, and there is a good capacity for improvement, especially in the planning of greater consistency between the two classes. There are very good links with parents and carers, who value the home visits before children start.

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

Responses received from two fifths of the parents and carers were very positive. All 13 questionnaire statements were approved or strongly approved almost unanimously. Parents and carers feel that their children greatly enjoy school, that they are safe and that they make good progress in their learning. They believe that the school is well managed and that teaching is good. Typical of the many comments was, 'We are very happy that our children are at this school. The staff are committed to caring for our children and giving them a well-rounded education with lots of exciting opportunities.' A very small number of parents or carers had concerns but none expressed strong disagreement with any statement.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thatcham Park C of E 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 133 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 345 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	88	67	44	33	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	86	65	46	35	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	67	50	64	48	2	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	70	53	59	44	4	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	74	56	59	44	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	64	48	65	49	4	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	61	46	72	54	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)	51	38	70	53	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	63	47	66	50	4	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	53	40	71	53	2	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	56	42	66	50	4	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	78	59	53	40	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	83	62	47	35	2	2	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.



17 January 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thatcham Park C of E Primary School, Thatcham RG18 4NP

Thank you all for helping us so much to enjoy our visit to your school recently. We were very impressed with how well you behaved, how much you enjoy your learning and the number of you who told us you liked your teachers and all the other helpers in school. It was a pleasure to see you so involved with learning to play brass instruments, and to hear from you all about your clubs and visits. We think that you go to a good school.

You are very well cared for, and the staff do all they can to help you, especially those of you who have particular problems. You are well taught by your teachers, make good progress in your learning, and by the time you leave you are at the levels we would expect for your age in writing, reading and mathematics. We think that you learn very well in information and communication technology and art, and congratulate the football team on winning the police competition. Also we were very pleased to hear how much your parents and carers like the school and staff, and how much they are helping the school. We believe that the school has every chance of doing even better in the future, and have suggested ways in which this could happen. We have asked your headteacher and leaders to:

- encourage you to try to become more independent in your learning, and make decisions more often yourselves, rather than just wait to be told what to do by your teachers
- help you to decide how well you are doing in your work, and decide what you think you can do better
- let you get on to your learning tasks in lessons as quickly as possible when they think you are ready, so that you are not too long on the carpet.

You can see that much of this is up to you. It's called helping you to take responsibility for your own learning. We are sure that you can do it! Thanks again for being so helpful and cheerful, and good luck in the future.

Yours sincerely

Rod Braithwaite

Lead inspector

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