

Thomas Johnson Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109468
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	356554
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Paul Canham

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	106
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lucinda Stanier-Martin
Headteacher	Kevin Nolan
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 11 lessons, observed five teachers and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and a group of pupils, and talked with pupils in lessons. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including assessment and attendance information, lesson plans, safeguarding arrangements, school development planning, minutes of governing body meetings and pupils' work. Inspectors also scrutinised the 53 questionnaires received from parents and carers, as well as those from staff and a sample of pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The extent to which higher expectations are increasing the level of challenge especially for boys and the more able pupils.
- How much improvements to assessment procedures have strengthened monitoring and extended the accountability of staff.
- The extent to which the recently formed senior leadership team and the governing body are influencing the school's direction and performance.

Information about the school

Thomas Johnson Lower is smaller than most other primary schools. The large majority of pupils are from families of White British heritage. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is below average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is also below average.

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage into the nursery class. Throughout the school pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. The school has achieved National Healthy Schools Status.

There have been substantial changes to the membership of the governing body, including the Chair and Vice-Chair.

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. It provides a caring and supportive environment that places a strong focus on enhancing pupils' self-esteem and raising achievement. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and keeping safe. Through the school's effective links with outside agencies, local schools and the community, pupils willingly take a full part in supporting a number of national and international charities. By helping younger children in the nursery at lunchtime and in the role of monitors, pupils assist in the smooth running of the school. Pupils' good personal outcomes are reflected in their considerate behaviour in lessons and around the school. Their involvement in activities provides opportunities for them to develop confidence and refine their creative and performing skills, which include the playing of musical instruments. This picture is reflected in discussions and the questionnaires completed by pupils, where they indicated that they enjoy school very much. Attendance levels are high.

The school's awareness of its strengths and weaknesses is informed by increasingly accurate and effective self-evaluation processes, such as the systems for monitoring pupils' progress and setting challenging but realistic targets for improvement. Consequently, the governing body and school leaders have a clear understanding of where the school is now and of the priorities that need to be addressed. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

The school is aware that a small minority of parents and carers do not feel that they get enough information about their children's progress or school events. This picture is seen in the comments made by a minority of parents and carers who returned the questionnaire. They indicated that they are not kept well enough informed about their children's learning. With the support of the governing body, the headteacher is beginning to resolve this issue.

Progress is good throughout the school. The push for consistently good teaching is evident in the continual review of classroom practice. Topics that link different subjects provide pupils with good opportunities to work on activities that interest them and develop their investigative skills. They also encourage pupils to read and write for a range of purposes and to find out the meanings of different words. Good relationships are used well to raise academic expectations. Consequently, pupils are progressing well in lessons that are, typically, well paced, pitched at the right level and lift their interests. Intervention work is appropriately supporting individual and/or different groups of pupils.

Pupils are respectful and value the views of others, but have a limited knowledge of communities in this country and in other parts of the world. Opportunities for developing these aspects of community cohesion are missed when linking learning together across different parts of the curriculum.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the strategy for promoting community cohesion by:
 - creating more opportunities for pupils to appreciate and value people from communities in this country and around the world
 - ensuring that these are included in planning when linking subjects.
- Strengthen links with parents and carers by:
 - increasing the range of methods of communicating between home and school
 - involving them more in their children's learning through planned meetings and workshops.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' enjoyment of learning, as seen particularly in their eagerness to become involved in engaging activities in English, mathematics and music, is characteristic of lessons. The pace of learning is good, although it is uneven with small differences between classes. Pupils work well independently of teachers in small groups and readily share information, showing a curiosity and a determination to get the tasks right. In English, they read with expression, clarity and confidence, when given the opportunity to rehearse the parts of a play that could be performed on the radio. In mathematics, pupils are eager to find out how different objects can be sorted into different groups with common characteristics. Pupils are also keen to apply rules in mathematics to solve problems that relate to everyday experiences. Pupils show great satisfaction in exploring ideas and using different colours during art. There are no significant variations in the rates of progress made by boys and girls, more able pupils, or those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Children join the nursery with broadly expected starting points and make good gains through to the end of Reception. Attainment is above average, as indicated by the 2010 national assessments for pupils in Year 2. School tracking data show that learning and progress are good and pupils in the current Year 4 are reaching above average levels of attainment that are similar to last year's group. A significant number of pupils are working at levels above those expected for their age, with particular strengths in reading.

Pupils say they like coming to school because they enjoy the activities and feel secure in a supportive environment. These positive attitudes are reflected in their high attendance. Pupils are polite and courteous. They show interest and readily celebrate each other's achievements, during assembly, for example. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, and staff are working to increase pupils' knowledge of communities in other parts of this country and beyond. Pupils' good understanding of living healthily is evident in the way they talk about the importance of eating different kinds of food and the need for regular exercise. The school council provides good opportunities for pupils to represent the views of others and help make decisions regarding playground equipment and which charities to support, for example.

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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	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	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

Good relationships, clear learning intentions and engaging activities are particular strengths of teaching. Probing questioning often gives pupils opportunities to think about their work and reflect on the answers. Topics, such as those that encourage imaginative writing and make links between the different subjects, successfully capture pupils' interest and hold their attention. As a result, pupils become interested in their learning and want to find out more for themselves. Assessment procedures are used effectively to guide lesson planning. Marking is constructive but does not consistently give pupils enough information about what they need to do to improve. Just occasionally, pupils take time to settle and are not fully engaged in their work.

Attractive and informative displays give an insight into the diversity of the curriculum, which provides a carefully considered balance between basic skills in English and mathematics and the development of pupils' performance and creative skills in subjects such as art, music, and physical education. The teaching of French gives an additional positive dimension. Skills, including the ability to work collaboratively and independently are encouraged. Pupils' learning experiences are further enriched by outside specialists and a supportive and sensitive programme of personal, social and health education. The curriculum is underpinned by the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT), which enhances learning and gives pupils access to a wide range of resources.

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The school provides good support for pupils' personal development and pastoral care. Staff know the pupils well and close links have been established with some families. Attention to pupils' health and well-being is reflected not just in the range of opportunities for physical activity, but also in the provision of healthy school meals. Individualised programmes of support are made for pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable to underachievement, some of which cover a wide range of personal and learning needs. Individual achievement is managed effectively through detailed tracking of pupils' attainment and progress. Close liaison with parents and outside agencies and tailored individual attention enables those pupils with the greatest needs to build confidence and improve skills in literacy and numeracy.

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, with close support from governors, has introduced a number of changes since the last inspection, which include a reorganisation of staff and revised assessment procedures. These modifications were introduced to sharpen the focus on key priorities and to build on improvements. The school is totally committed to strengthening each pupil's confidence and to raising achievement. Collective leadership is playing a full and active part in the drive for sustained improvement, which is reflected in pupils' good progress and above-average attainment. The promotion of equality and approaches to tackling any form of discrimination are good. As a result, all groups of pupils make similar progress.

The effectiveness of the governing body is good. It readily challenges the school's work and continues to strengthen its monitoring role with the help of a comprehensive training programme. The governing body ensures that policies are systematically reviewed and resources are closely targeted at educational need. Attention to pupils' safety is integral to the school's work and safeguarding procedures are securely established. Local services and agencies are used well to enhance the safety and well-being of pupils experiencing difficult circumstances and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Community cohesion is strongly promoted within the school and in the local community. The school demonstrates a good understanding of local needs and challenges through its links with schools and outside agencies and the way it evaluates its effectiveness. However, the school has not yet developed sufficient links with areas further afield in this country and abroad to the same level. Parents and carers are supportive of the school and play an active part in some school events, including reading projects. However, the school

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has not done enough to ensure that parents and carers are kept fully informed about how well their children are doing.

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	3
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

Good links have been established with parents and carers so that children settle rapidly, are eager to learn and make good progress. Staff, working well as a team, have successfully established a welcoming environment in which children are nurtured and encouraged from the start. Children make particularly good progress in their personal and social skills and in their language development. Effective assessment procedures are beginning to ensure that staff have accurate and reliable information about children's progress. Support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and for those whose circumstances make them most vulnerable, is good.

Teachers and other adults promote the use of language particularly well and, as a result, children listen attentively and chatter enthusiastically about their work. The school makes effective use of both the indoor and outside areas, which provide a wide range of resources to develop confidence and promote independent learning. Children happily move from one activity to another. Questioning is usually used well to probe their understanding and capture interest, although it sometimes lacks precision. Themed topics, such as those that often relate to the books the children are reading, ensure areas of learning are covered, with a particular focus on early reading, writing and number skills.

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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 majority of parents and carers who returned the inspection questionnaires expressed positive views about the school's work. A minority of parents or carers made written comments. Some of these expressed considerable satisfaction with the school and included positive remarks about the caring and welcoming environment, the quality of the staff and the range of learning opportunities. However, the majority of the written comments included reservations over a number of issues. These included concerns about: the degree of communication between school and home; behaviour; and the amount of progress their children are making. The school is developing its website and the governing body is looking into different strategies that could be used to give parents and carers opportunities to discuss their children's learning. Behaviour was good, although occasionally pupils do not always pay close enough attention to the tasks in lessons. The inspectors judged that pupils are making good progress.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

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

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 53 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 106 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	58	18	34	3	6	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	29	55	23	43	0	0	1	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	12	23	23	43	13	25	2	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	36	21	40	10	19	2	4
The teaching is good at this school	19	36	24	45	5	9	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	12	23	28	53	11	21	2	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	28	32	60	4	8	2	4
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)	17	32	20	38	3	6	2	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	12	23	28	53	11	21	2	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	10	19	23	43	9	17	5	9
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	13	25	28	53	10	19	2	4
The school is led and managed effectively	18	34	23	43	6	11	3	6
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	21	40	23	43	6	11	3	6

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 all 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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thomas Johnson Lower School, Bedford, MK43 0SB

We very much enjoyed our visit to your school - thank you for making us feel so welcome. Yours is a good school where you feel safe and benefit from good care and support. You told us it is also a place where you want to be, make friends, and enjoy taking part in the different activities. The majority of your parents and carers expressed satisfaction with the school.

Here are some other important things about your school.

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

You attend regularly and respond enthusiastically to activities that encourage you to think creatively.

You make a good contribution to the smooth running of the school and contribute successfully to local events.

You have a good understanding of what makes for a healthy lifestyle and healthy eating.

To make things even better for you, we have asked your school to do these things.

Improve communication with your parents and carers so that they have a better understanding of what you are doing.

Help you to understand more about people and communities in other parts of this country and the wider world.

We wish each one of you every success in your future education and hope that you continue to enjoy learning as much as you do now. You can all help the school by continuing to work hard.

Yours sincerely

Paul Canham

Lead inspector

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