

# Thurleigh Lower School

## Inspection report

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|                                |                 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 109486          |
| <b>Local Authority</b>         | Bedford         |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 356558          |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>        | 14–15 June 2011 |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b>     | Peter Clifton   |

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

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|--|---|
| <b>Type of school</b>                      | First   |
| <b>School category</b>                     | Foundation                                    |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                 | 3–9   |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                    | Mixed   |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b> | 73  |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>               | The governing body                            |
| <b>Chair</b>                               | David Brealey                                 |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                         | Verity Kenyon                                 |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>  | 17 October 2007                               |
| <b>School address</b>                      | High Street<br>Thurleigh, Bedford<br>MK44 2DB |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                    | 01234 771252                                  |
| <b>Fax number</b>                          | 01234 771252                                  |
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited seven lessons and observed three teachers. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff and pupils. The inspectors talked to pupils in lessons and at break times. They observed the school's work and looked at documentation, including: development planning, monitoring information, evidence of safeguarding procedures and pupils' books. They analysed 40 responses to the parental questionnaire and took account of the views expressed by parents and carers during informal meetings and conversations.

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

- Inspectors considered the accuracy of the school's information about the progress and learning of different groups of pupils, particularly any differences between boys and girls and in writing.
- They looked at how well work challenges different groups of pupils and the effectiveness of intervention strategies for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- They examined how well targets are used by pupils to help them assess their own work and set personal goals.
- They investigated how rigorously leaders identify and prioritise actions to improve pupils' learning and progress, including the success of initiatives to improve writing and the use and application of skills in mathematics.

## Information about the school

This is a much smaller than the average sized school of its type serving the local area. There are three mixed-age classes. The Nursery and Reception children are taught together in the mornings. In the afternoons, the Reception children are taught separately while Nursery children can attend on-site pre-school provision which is managed privately. The private provision was not part of this inspection. There is a separate outside learning area provided for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Most pupils are of White British origin. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. Their main needs relate to learning and social and behavioural difficulties. The school is federated with Kymbrook Lower School. The headteacher divides her time between the two schools; there is one governing body for both. The school runs a daily breakfast and after-school club.

**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

Thurleigh Lower is a good school where pupils' attainment is above average and both boys and girls make good progress from their different starting points. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are particularly able also make good progress in their learning, because adults have a very clear understanding of their different needs and plan well to meet them. Pupils' attendance is high, reflecting how much they like coming to school and a curriculum which provides many memorable experiences. Pupils' exemplary attitudes are an outstanding factor in their successful learning. Their behaviour is excellent. The school's very strong promotion of values, for example, being kind and respectful, helps to create an extremely positive school ethos where the pupils get on noticeably well with each other. They readily say what they think and contribute confidently in discussion. Pupils relish working together in groups. Older pupils in Year 4, for example, love having mathematics challenges to work on together and problems to solve. Pupils say they always feel safe in school and their understanding about keeping themselves safe is generally good.

A notable feature of the teaching is the way adults capture pupils' interest and imagination, for example, through the use of drama, discussion, music and information and communication technology. The pupils recall with enthusiasm the 'medieval day' linked to the topic on 'dungeons and dragons'. The 'aliens' landing in the school field was used as a stimulus for several extended writing activities. These are helping to raise attainment even further. Pupils have personal learning targets in English and mathematics. However, they are not yet assessing their own work in depth so that they can strongly direct learning for themselves. The outside wooded area is an excellent resource which is used, for example, to hunt for 'bugs' and explore the environment.

The headteacher's leadership of the school, within the federation, is firmly established and expertise between the two schools is shared effectively, for example, to support topic planning. Leaders have securely maintained and built on the good and outstanding areas identified when the school was last inspected. Improvements in provision are accelerating the rate of pupils' progress. There are detailed records mapping the progress of each pupil as they move through the school in reading, writing and mathematics. In other areas, for example information and communication technology, this is not as detailed. Leaders have rightly identified improvement in this area as a key priority so that they can ensure provision is even more sharply focused on pupils' needs to support their learning. Self-evaluation is strong and the school demonstrates a good capacity for sustained development.

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## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve opportunities for pupils to assess their own work in depth so that they can have a stronger role in directing learning for themselves.
- Extend the detailed tracking of knowledge, skills and understanding into other areas of the curriculum, including information and communication technology, so that provision can be even more sharply focused on pupils' needs to support their learning.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**2**

Children typically start school with skills, knowledge and understanding that are broadly in line with those expected for their age. By the time they reach Year 4, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is above average. In Year 4, for example, pupils explored how different sized bookcases could be combined to fit in a given space. They confidently used their mental mathematics skills to add together two- and three-digit numbers. Year 3 pupils knew how to add together a combination of centimetres and millimetres and expressed the result using decimals. In Year 2, both boys and girls talked enthusiastically about their 'dreamtime' creatures based on Aboriginal culture. Their writing used adventurous vocabulary, for example, 'beautiful symmetrical butterfly'. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress, often because of the intervention of teaching assistants who provide support through probing questioning. The growing strength in writing has secure foundations initiated in the lower part of the school because of pupils' knowledge and understanding of letters and sounds.

Around the school, pupils are very well-mannered and polite. They play safely together and are considerate towards each other, particularly in lessons. Older pupils have very mature attitudes towards learning. Pupils' good understanding about how to keep themselves safe includes awareness of road safety and the importance of rules during visits and trips. They know how unhealthy smoking and drinking alcohol can be. They have a good understanding of the sorts of healthy food that they should eat such as vegetables and fruit, although some are yet to make these choices out of school. Pupils set up and run an 'assault' course at lunchtimes which is popular. The school council provides an effective voice for the pupils. The 'suggestion box' is used to gather ideas and these are debated. The pupils say that they are trying to make the school a healthier place and would like to be given a bit more responsibility to run things for themselves. They participate keenly in the yearly 'young entrepreneurs fair' to see who can raise the most money. Pupils are curious about the world around them and are developing their understanding of others from different backgrounds and cultures securely.

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*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| Taking into account:  |          |
| Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>   | 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        |
| <b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>   | <b>2</b> |
| <b>Pupils' behaviour</b>  | <b>1</b> |
| <b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b> | <b>2</b> |
| Taking into account:  |          |
| Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>   | 1        |
| <b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>  | <b>2</b> |

<sup>1</sup> 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?

Teachers are highly effective in keeping pupils interested and motivated. They provide a range of purposeful activities which often fire pupils' imagination and cater for the full range of abilities. Pupils are regularly reminded to think about their individual targets. However, these are not yet being used to their fullest extent. Targets are sometimes too superficial and there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to assess their own work in depth and identify new learning goals. Questioning nearly always requires pupils to think carefully about what they understand. The use of discussion is a regular feature of lessons which supports learning well. Teachers trust pupils to take responsibility for their own learning in groups. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive good support, for example in developing their basic number skills. They persevere with tasks they sometimes find difficult.

The curriculum is exceptionally well planned and promotes high levels of imagination and creativity. Planning includes a major topic each term which links together different subject areas and a daily focus on basic skills development. There are some great ideas to promote imaginative writing for example 'aliens love underpants' and 'how to keep your dragon'. The topics provide plenty of ideas for science work including practical investigation and explanation of scientific understanding. The school's homework policy is directly linked to the curriculum and provides further opportunities, for example, for pupils to research, use their imaginations, present work using information and communication

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technology and write at length. During the inspection, there were many opportunities for pupils to sing together including singing in parts. Pupils play together happily at the breakfast club and enjoy the extensive grounds to run about during the after-school club.

Pupils and their parents are known individually. Attendance has improved over the last year: the school follows up on any absence rigorously and regular attendance is celebrated. Parents are welcomed into school at the start of the day. There are very strong links with the on-site pre-school provision and frequent contact with the middle school to ensure that pupils are confident about moving on, including special arrangements for those who might find the transition difficult. The school is quick to assess the needs of any new pupil, including any gaps in learning, so that provision can be tailored to fit their individual needs.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>The quality of teaching</b>   | <b>2</b> |
| Taking into account:<br>The use of assessment to support learning  | 2        |
| <b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b> | <b>1</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>   | <b>1</b> |

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The senior leadership team has high expectations of staff and pupils. Leaders are backed up well by knowledgeable and enthusiastic teachers. There is a strong sense of common purpose. This has resulted in new initiatives being firmly implemented and evaluated. The governing body has been influential in utilising strengths from across the federation to support development within the school. Its members are knowledgeable about strengths and weaknesses and confidently challenge the headteacher about pupils' progress and attainment. The governing body seeks the views of parents and carers regularly and acts on the outcomes. Safeguarding duties are met well. Staff have been trained well in child protection and all the required checks are made and rigorously updated. External agencies are used well where necessary to support pupils with specific needs.

Leaders track the progress of individual pupils and groups across the school very regularly and use this information to hold teachers to account for progress in English and mathematics and to direct any additional resources where necessary. Initiatives to extend this to science have been introduced; plans for information and communication technology are at an early stage of development. The provision to secure equal opportunities and tackle discrimination is good. There is a strong emphasis on rights and responsibilities, based on the school's value-based ethos. Improvements in provision are ensuring that any differences in the performance between different groups are closing. Pupils from different backgrounds in the school work together very harmoniously. Leaders have forged links with a contrasting school in Bedford to widen pupils' understanding about diversity. The 'international week' provides pupils with some good insights into the culture and traditions of different countries.

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*These are the grades for leadership and management*

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| Taking into account:<br>The leadership and management of teaching and learning   | 2        |
| <b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b> | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>   | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>   | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>  | <b>2</b> |

## **Early Years Foundation Stage**

Children join the school with a broad spread of skills, knowledge and understanding. They make good progress from their different starting points and by the time they enter Year 1 nearly all reach the expected levels and a good number exceed them. There have been significant improvements made to the outside learning area since the previous inspection. The children enjoy playing in the sand, riding on trikes and using the climbing equipment.

In Reception, the children joined in well with a new African song, quickly learning the actions and some of the words. Some particularly liked roaring like lions. Letters and their sounds are being taught skilfully as part of more formal activities. Children use this information to write and spell words and several are now writing simple sentences. The most able children join in with activities alongside pupils in Years 1 and 2. They are beginning to use targets to help them to improve their writing; there is scope to develop this further.

The children in the Nursery and Reception clearly feel safe and well supported. Staff work very closely together to ensure that the children's needs are met and assess and track their development exceptionally well. Records provide a clear picture of children's attainment and progress across the areas of learning.

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*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>                   | <b>2</b> |
| 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

Around 55% of parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. Returns indicate a strong level of satisfaction with what the school provides. There were several very positive comments praising the work of the school, including the strong leadership of the headteacher. One parent or carer comments that her child enjoys every aspect of school life. A few parents or carers raise concerns about homework. Leaders are aware of this from their own surveys which have been published in well-written and engaging newsletters. Inspectors were impressed with the quality of the work produced in pupils' homework books.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thurleigh 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 40 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 73 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements  | Strongly agree |    | Agree |    | Disagree |   | Strongly disagree |   |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|---|-------------------|---|
|   | Total          | %  | Total | %  | Total    | % | Total             | % |
| My child enjoys school  | 24             | 60 | 16    | 40 | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school keeps my child safe  | 28             | 70 | 11    | 28 | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 |
| My school informs me about my child's progress  | 23             | 58 | 13    | 33 | 3        | 8 | 0                 | 0 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school   | 21             | 53 | 16    | 40 | 1        | 3 | 0                 | 0 |
| The teaching is good at this school   | 24             | 60 | 14    | 35 | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning  | 23             | 58 | 12    | 30 | 2        | 5 | 1                 | 3 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle   | 18             | 45 | 21    | 53 | 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) | 26             | 65 | 10    | 25 | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs  | 18             | 45 | 20    | 50 | 1        | 3 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour  | 15             | 38 | 21    | 53 | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns   | 17             | 43 | 17    | 43 | 1        | 3 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school is led and managed effectively   | 24             | 60 | 14    | 35 | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school   | 25             | 63 | 12    | 30 | 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 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      | 46  | 48   | 6            | 0          |
| Primary schools      | 6   | 47   | 40           | 7          |
| Secondary schools    | 12  | 39   | 38           | 11         |
| Sixth forms          | 13  | 42   | 41           | 3          |
| Special schools      | 28  | 49   | 19           | 4          |
| Pupil referral units | 14  | 45   | 31           | 10         |
| All schools          | 10  | 46   | 37           | 7          |

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul> |
| 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.**



16 June 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Thurleigh Lower School, Bedford MK44 2DB**

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and for talking to us about your work. You were very polite and friendly. You told us that you enjoy coming to school, and feel safe all of the time when you are there. You go to a good school and here are some of the things we particularly liked about it.

You are given some great activities to do which are helping you to improve, especially in writing. We really enjoyed reading about the 'aliens' who landed in your school grounds.

You get on noticeably well together during play times and help each other a lot in lessons.

Those of you with special educational needs and/or disabilities are given extra support and this is helping you to make good progress.

Your teachers use lots of different ways to help you to learn.

Your headteacher keeps a very careful eye on how well you are doing in reading, writing and mathematics.

Your teachers work well together to help you with your learning.

To help you make even faster progress, we have asked your headteacher to make sure you have better opportunities to assess your own work so that you can work out for yourselves what you need to do to improve. Your teachers know a lot about how well you are doing in reading, writing and mathematics and we agree with them that they need to improve how well they measure your progress in information and communication technology and other subjects, so that they can help you to learn even better.

You can help your teachers by continuing to come to school so regularly.

Yours sincerely

Peter Clifton

Lead inspector

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