

Whaley Thorns Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112793
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	378562
Inspection dates	22–23 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Andrew Stafford

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	153
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anne Manning
Headteacher	Kay Walker
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2008
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons and observed seven teachers. They held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at the data the school has collected on pupils' attainment and progress, the school strategic plan, lesson and curriculum planning, and procedures for keeping pupils safe. The inspection team scrutinised 39 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, and also spoke with a number of parents and carers.

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

- The consistency with which pupils make progress in English and mathematics across the school.
- The way teachers use information from assessments to help pupils make progress in their learning.
- The effectiveness of the school leaders' strategies to raise standards.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than average. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in two classes of mixed-age pupils. There are three other mixed-age classes and one single age class in Year 3. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic circumstances in the surrounding areas. Most of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. The current proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average, with most of these pupils having either moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school has recently gained a number of awards, including Activemark and the Intermediate International Schools Award, and has achieved national Healthy Schools status. Staffing is now stable following a period of instability.

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

Whaley Thorns is good school that serves its community well. The school is a safe and very caring environment with a happy atmosphere in which pupils grow into confident and mature young people. Parents and carers are very pleased with the quality of education the school provides. Typically, one wrote, 'I am really happy with the way the school has supported my child academically over the years. Teachers and teaching assistants are all helpful and will always listen to any questions or concerns. They always make my child feel welcome and it is a lovely feeling to think my child loves to go to school'.

Since the last inspection the school has improved the quality of care, guidance and support and the effectiveness of partnerships in promoting pupils' learning and well-being. Both are now outstanding. It has maintained pupils' good progress and achievement, the outstanding curriculum, and the good quality of teaching and learning. Now that staffing is stable, the school has successfully tackled previous underachievement through effective improvement plans and the determined leadership of the headteacher. As a result, attainment is rising and progress and achievement are good and improving. Good progress is particularly evident in Year 6. The leaders' drive to improve the school is clearly articulated and enthusiastically embraced by staff, especially in literacy and numeracy. Leaders' very rigorous monitoring of the school's performance provides them with secure and accurate information for self-evaluation. Their subsequent actions have brought about significant improvement. This leadership record shows the school has a good capacity to improve further.

Teaching and learning have improved as a result of focused professional development for staff. Teachers plan interesting and relevant work that leads most pupils to make good progress. As a result, relationships are strong and pupils have positive attitudes to their work and try hard. Teachers and teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to learning through the well-timed use of their expertise in supporting those who need help with literacy and numeracy. This is most evident for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, who have regular individual tuition to tackle their different needs. Many good lessons were seen across the school. Occasionally teachers do not plan work that precisely matches the needs of different pupils in the class teaching, and in such cases teaching is no better than satisfactory. Marking is generally good, regular and up-to-date. Pupils have infrequent opportunities to reflect on their achievement, so not all of them recognise clearly what it is they need to do to improve the quality of their work.

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Pupils are cared for very well in school and feel safe. They really enjoy lessons, school clubs and meeting friends. The interest and challenge that the curriculum provides, especially for the boys, is promoting accelerated progress. For example, a current project on Egypt links aspects of numeracy, literacy and social history. The regular use of computers and games to support learning engages pupils well. Pupils share a range of religious festivals, which gives them a developing insight into the diversity of British culture. Almost all pupils come to school regularly, making attendance average.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that the level of challenge and progress in lessons are consistently good, by setting work that closely matches the needs of each pupil and fully stretches them.
- Raise attainment by providing more frequent opportunities for pupils to reflect on their achievements, so that they clearly recognise how to improve their work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

All groups of pupils enjoy learning, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities who receive regular additional support, and their achievement is good. The progress of boys has accelerated and they now make the same progress as the girls. Children start Reception with skills well below those expected nationally for their age. The learning observed in lessons was almost always good and occasionally satisfactory. Pupils are keen to learn, try their best and take pride in their work. Their research and planning skills are quickly improving and many are becoming proficient at managing their own learning. Pupils enjoy discussing ideas in small groups and with their class, and this is promoting their self-confidence, communication skills and understanding. This was seen when Year 4/5 pupils were enthralled by imagining the feelings and motivation behind the activities of characters from a story they had read. Talking with partners and working in groups, pupils were able to devise open-ended questions that they put to 'Bradley' who had to respond from the 'hot seat'. This imaginative approach enabled the pupils to recount the story and write enthusiastically their own interpretations of the characters' feelings by the close of the session. However, occasionally pupils find their work either too hard or too easy and this slows their progress. The outcomes of pupils' work in information and communication technology, and in art and design, are above national expectations. Attainment in English and mathematics has been consistently average for some years, but is now beginning to rise.

Pupils are confident that any rare cases of bullying will be quickly resolved by the school. They know precisely how to keep themselves and others safe. They do their best to eat a healthy diet and benefit from the Bolsover Sports Partnership for

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enhanced opportunities to take plenty of exercise. Pupils are keen to take responsibility. The majority feel confident that they can suggest improvements and, for example, the school council regularly passes on its views on how to improve the school. Older pupils act as house captains, play leaders with younger children at playtimes and as buddy readers with those who need extra reading opportunities. Pupils have helped pick up litter from around the village and place a sculpture in Poulter Park as part of their efforts to understand their heritage and enhance their local environment. Pupils collect generously for charity. Positive attitudes, opportunities to be involved in enterprise projects, and rising standards in the basic skills mean pupils’ preparation for secondary school and future work is good. Pupils reflect maturely on their own feelings and those of others, for example through the study of apartheid and human rights. A strong moral code supports their good behaviour. Pupils work productively in teams and their links to a school in Israel lead them to appreciate different cultures and traditions as a means of counteracting prejudice. These opportunities contribute effectively to their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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	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 developed skills that enable them to plan interesting and relevant work that engages pupils well. Generally, they are raising their expectations of the effort and progress that pupils need to make. They make good use of resources, such as electronic whiteboards, to develop learning. The impact of this strengthening of teaching was evident in the good progress made by Year 6 pupils in 2011. In the

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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Year 1/2 class, teachers’ questions and the tasks set really make pupils think. The challenge provided by teaching occasionally falls from the usual high level. Pupils have an improving understanding of their challenging targets.

The outstanding curriculum supports pupils’ academic and personal development very well and has led to improved progress in most subjects. Half-termly cross-curricular topics provide pupils with good opportunities to develop creative skills and their knowledge of the world, and pursue personal interests. Recent changes to the English and mathematics curriculum, to reinforce skills more systematically, have given these subjects greater appeal, especially to the boys. The school exploits the rich resources found within its boundaries, at their nearby allotment and at local historical sites. This extends opportunities to study the natural world to promote excellence and enjoyment. A good range of well-attended clubs and many educational visits, including a residential stay at Chatsworth, add to pupils’ enjoyment of school and widen their horizons.

Staff use their detailed knowledge of each pupil expertly to provide them with outstanding pastoral care. There is compelling evidence of the success of such support for individual pupils’ learning and well-being. Pupils with a concern turn confidently to an adult, knowing that it will be quickly resolved. The tracking of academic progress gives accurate information that enables teachers to provide effective individual support for pupils who are falling behind and help them catch up rapidly. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive sympathetic support and learning programmes that mean they join in all that the school offers and make equally good progress as their peers. The school has a strong team approach and uses its four trained mentors to target very effective support for pupils and families whose circumstances have the potential to make them vulnerable. It works closely with a great many external agencies to promote pupils’ education and welfare. The rising attendance figures over recent years show that the school’s hard work with pupils, parents and carers to improve attendance is proving successful.

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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders, particularly the headteacher and the Chair of the Governing Body, articulate clearly to staff their ambitious targets and their plans to make the school better. The English and mathematics subject leaders take a high level of responsibility for checking standards in their areas and ensuring they are improving. Leaders have

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accurately identified needs and have provided successful training that has sharpened teachers’ skills. One example of this is teachers’ better understanding of how to make English and mathematics lessons interesting and relevant. The school’s use of its tracking system to identify any pupils making slow progress is helping to improve outcomes, although it does not show leaders easily how well different groups are learning. Governance is good and the governing body is very supportive of the school. Its members’ good understanding of data means that they are able to challenge the school over its performance and rigorously hold leaders to account. Through links with subjects and staff, the governing body has an up-to-date view of what is happening in the school and this is helping to improve provision.

Regular homework and the valuable help and advice given to parents and carers support children’s education at home. The school puts its commitment to equal opportunities at the centre of its ethos, and the success of its plans to remedy previous gender differences in progress shows that its policies are having a good impact. The thorough way that the school carefully checks the progress of different groups of pupils reflects its strong commitment to promoting equal opportunities and tackling discrimination. Safety and safeguarding are given a high priority. The governing body regularly discusses safeguarding to ensure the rigour of its provision. The school makes rigorous checks on the suitability of adults to work with pupils. Child protection procedures are robust, regularly updated and fully meet current requirements.

The school is a happy and harmonious society in which pupils from all backgrounds integrate well. It promotes community cohesion well in the local area and there are many notable successes. For example, the school works closely with Sure Start staff to provide support and advice for families with younger children. Pupils see themselves as members of the community through their involvement in extended school provision, and especially by taking part in holiday clubs. It is promoting religious cohesion through the celebration of a range of religious festivals that encourage an understanding of Muslim, Sikh and Christian worship. The school supports pupils’ understanding of diversity by developing links with a school in Derby that has pupils from very diverse cultural backgrounds.

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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and	2

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tackles discrimination	
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Boys and girls make similarly good progress in all areas of learning because teaching is good. Children are well behaved and polite to each other and to adults, and their personal development is good. Parents and carers feel well informed about their child’s progress and are happy with the advice they are given about how to help their learning at home. Children are very safe and well cared for in the classrooms and in the very stimulating outdoor learning area.

Teachers’ good planning ensures there is an appropriate balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities which promote good learning. Children were seen to learn new words as the teacher called out, ‘Go through, go over, go up and across,’ as they shared the large outdoor climbing equipment. Learning became more independent when they played ‘follow the leader’ and this led on to the group singing nursery rhymes that added more words to their vocabulary. Adults pointed out important features in the play activities that stimulated speaking and listening. Children responded and talked about what they saw, for example, ‘Look at my house that has a tree in it,’ and, ‘The car is carrying a cat.’ These activities supported well the earlier session of learning letters and sounds that had taken place inside. In a free choice session a group talked about their paintings. One girl called her work ‘the princess wall’; one boy announced, ‘Mine’s a tiger.’ Both showed their growing appreciation of the world around them, their gaining of independence and their skills of collaboration. Children concentrate well and especially enjoy learning outside in the rich learning environment.

Photographs taken during activities help adults to assess the quality of learning for individual children and progress is noted by the teacher as part of planning for each individual’s next steps in learning. The training provided for adults who work in the Early Years Foundation Stage is promoting their teaching skills well. Occasionally learning slows when the recently introduced ideas to improve progress in literacy and numeracy have not had sufficient time to have full impact. Leaders are correctly working hard to fine-tune assessments to make planning more precise so that children’s progress is even better.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	2

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Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The response rate of parents and carers who returned a questionnaire was below average for a primary school, but they they are very happy with the quality of education the school provides. Many added positive comments about how much their child enjoys school and how confident they are about their child’s safety. Many parents and carers said they believe the headteacher leads the school well and that teachers are welcoming and approachable. A very small number of parents and carers raised specific concerns about safety. Inspectors explored these concerns but found that the school’s safeguarding arrangements are well managed by staff and effective.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Whaley Thorns 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 39 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 153 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	79	7	18	1	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	33	85	6	15	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	24	62	13	33	2	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	27	69	11	28	1	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	29	74	10	26	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	26	67	10	26	2	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	25	64	14	36	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)	24	62	15	38	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	25	64	13	33	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	51	19	49	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	21	54	17	44	1	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	27	69	11	28	1	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	30	77	9	23	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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 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"> ■ 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.



24 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Whaley Thorns Primary School, Mansfield, NG20 9HB

Thank you for being so polite and friendly when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed having the opportunity to talk to some of you, and to see you in lessons and at play. I especially enjoyed seeing the happy breaks and lunchtimes when you can run around and enjoy your wonderful grounds. You are rightly proud of the school's happy atmosphere in which you all get on so well together. Whaley Thorns is a good school and it is improving. Here are some of the best things we found out:

- Your teachers ensure that you get off to a good start in Reception.
- You told us you enjoy school and feel safe and secure.
- You try your very best to eat a healthy diet and take plenty of exercise.
- Your behaviour is good.
- You have good relationships with your teachers and you try hard for them.
- The curriculum provides you with exciting lessons, clubs and visits, which you enjoy.
- Adults look after you very well and are always ready to help you.
- The headteacher and staff are working hard to make the school get better.

We have asked the school to do two things to help you do even better in your learning.

- Make sure teachers always provide you with work that is neither too hard nor too easy, so that you are always challenged to make better progress.
- Provide you with regular time to consider how well you have learnt, so that you can see clearly how to make your work better.

All of you can help the school by continuing to try your best in lessons, behaving well and supporting your classmates. We wish you all the best in the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Stafford
Lead inspector

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