



**Office for Standards  
in Education**

**Inspection report**  
**Thorpe Hamlet Middle School**

**Norfolk Education Authority**

Dates of inspection: 7-8 June 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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## **Basic information about the school**

Name of school:	Thorpe Hamlet Middle School
Type of school:	Middle (deemed primary school)
Status:	Community
Age range of pupils:	8 to 12 years
Headteacher:	Mr P Morton
Address of school:	Wolfe Road Norwich Norfolk NR1 4HT
Telephone:	01603 433014
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Mr P Shackleton
Local education authority area:	Norfolk
Unique reference number:	120955
Name of reporting inspector:	Mr P Brooker HMI
Dates of inspection:	7-8 June 2004

## Introduction

1. Thorpe Hamlet Middle School is situated to the east of Norwich city centre, in a residential area comprising older terraced housing and local authority homes. It is a very small middle school with 171 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of white UK heritage. Many are affected by a variety of social and educational disadvantages. At 38 per cent, the proportion of the pupils entitled to free school meals is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is above average. Four pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need, a proportion that is broadly in line with national figures. Five pupils speak English as an additional language. Pupil mobility is high because a significant number of pupils leave the school at the end of Year 6 to begin their secondary education elsewhere. The number on roll has declined in recent years, reflecting demographic changes in the local area.
2. The school was inspected in December 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and it was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.
3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of December 2002. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on three occasions to monitor the progress being made.
4. In June 2004 two HMI inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of December 2002.

## Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:
  - on entry to the school, the attainment of pupils is below national average figures, but they make sound and often good progress as they move through the school;
  - standards of attainment have improved significantly since the last inspection in December 2002. Results in end-of-Key Stage 2 tests in 2003 were broadly in line with national figures and well above those of similar schools. This was considerably better than the previous year, when results were well below national average figures;
  - standards remain uneven across the school, between subjects and between classes. The work of most pupils in literacy, numeracy, science and information and communication technology (ICT) is broadly in line with age-related expectations. However, in each year group there are significant numbers of pupils with low levels of literacy and numeracy;

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- the pupils' progress and their quality of learning have improved significantly since the last inspection. In general, pupils make satisfactory progress in lessons. However there remains too wide a variation between the most challenging lessons and those where the pace of learning is pedestrian. The quality of learning was at least satisfactory in 15 of the 17 lessons and good in five;
  - the pupils behave well and generally have positive attitudes to learning. Around the school, during break periods and in the lunch hall the pupils were friendly, polite and they interacted sensibly. Attitudes and behaviour were at least satisfactory in 16 of the 17 lessons, including six in which they were good. The teachers have a positive approach to the management of behaviour and agreed sanctions are applied consistently;
  - in all lessons the pupils settled quickly to their work. The majority applied themselves to their learning, showed interest in what they were doing and sustained their concentration well. However, a small but significant number of pupils have poor work habits. The school provides these individuals with extensive support and guidance;
  - attendance for the school year so far is 93.47 per cent. This is an improvement on the previous year, but is just below the national median. Unauthorised absence is in line with national figures. Punctuality is satisfactory;
  - provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of the pupils is satisfactory and the pupils' development in these areas is sound and at times good;
  - the quality of teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection. It is sound overall, with notable strengths. Teaching was at least satisfactory in 16 lessons and good or very good in six;
  - there remain some weaknesses in teaching, even in lessons that were satisfactory overall. Weaker teaching was suitably planned, but unclear exposition, and weaknesses in questioning and the management of discussions limited the overall progress that pupils made in these lessons;
  - the curriculum is broad and includes all subjects in reasonable depth and balance. The school exploits a few good-quality extracurricular opportunities, including trips and visiting speakers, in order to extend and enrich the curriculum;
  - provision for the pupils who have special educational needs is satisfactory. There is good, in-class support for individual pupils and for small groups;
  - the whole-school system for assessment is sound. Pupils' progress is assessed and recorded in English and mathematics on a termly basis. Class teachers use assessment data effectively to analyse the causes of underachievement and plan strategies to address these;
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- the headteacher and deputy headteacher provide good management and sound leadership for the school. The culture of self evaluation is well established: there are good systems for monitoring the work of the school and these inform development planning well. The senior management team is cohesive;
- the subject co-ordinators for English and mathematics provide good curriculum leadership. The roles of other curriculum managers, including year team leaders, have developed well, but there is too much variation in their effectiveness;
- the governing body is very well led and managed and has a clear understanding of its roles and responsibilities. The chair of governors provides a good balance of support and challenge. Governors are well informed about the school's progress and effectively hold it to account;
- the local education authority (LEA) has provided high levels of support and has monitored the school's progress regularly. This has had a significant impact on the capacity of the school's leadership and management and on the overall quality of teaching.

### **Key issues**

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- continue to raise standards of attainment;
- further strengthen the quality of teaching;
- improve the consistency and overall effectiveness of subject leadership.

### **Inspection findings**

#### **Standards achieved by the pupils**

7. On entry to the school, the attainment of the pupils is below national average figures, but they make sound and often good progress as they move through the school. Standards of attainment have improved significantly since the last inspection in December 2002. Results in end-of-Key Stage 2 tests in 2003 were broadly in line with national figures and well above those of similar schools. This was considerably better than the previous year, when results were well below national figures. The proportion of the pupils who achieved the expected Level 4 in mathematics and science was broadly in line with that seen nationally; it was slightly below this level in English. The proportion achieving the higher Level 5 was well above average in English, above average in science and below average in mathematics.

8. Standards remain uneven across the school, between subjects and between classes. The work of most pupils in literacy, numeracy, science and ICT is broadly in line with age-related expectations. However, in each year group there are significant numbers of pupils with low levels of literacy and numeracy.

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9. The pupils' progress and their quality of learning have improved significantly since the last inspection. In general, pupils make satisfactory progress in lessons. However there remains too wide a variation between the most challenging lessons and those where the pace of learning is pedestrian. The quality of learning was at least satisfactory in 15 of the 17 lessons and good in five. The school's assessment information indicates that the vast majority of pupils have made at least satisfactory and often good progress over the past year. Intervention programmes for targeted pupils, for example using individual improvement plans and spelling programmes, have increased their rates of progress.

10. Standards in literacy are improving. Standards in reading and writing are broadly in line with age-related expectations, although pockets of low attainment persist, notably in Year 5. Across the school, a significant number of pupils do not read or write fluently and accurately, and spelling is often weak. However, the school has taken a systematic approach to address these weaknesses: the pupils' literacy skills are assessed, schemes of work are suitably adapted and individual support is appropriately targeted. This evaluative approach to raising standards of literacy has accelerated pupils' improvement. Strategies for improving reading, in particular, have increased rates of progress. Furthermore, a recent work scrutiny indicates that the pupils now routinely apply the spelling strategies that were introduced at the start of the academic year. Further strategies have provided pupils with good opportunities for extended writing. The pupils show a growing confidence in structuring their writing. Older pupils write with reasonable accuracy and adapt their writing for different audiences and purposes. Displays of recent work by pupils in Year 6 and Year 7 show a good range of types of writing, including letters, poems, newspaper reports and non-chronological writing. The literacy co-ordinator has reviewed the balance and range of writing styles across non-core foundation subjects. The pupils have good opportunities to develop their writing skills in other subjects: in geography, for example, Year 7 pupils have written ballads based on their studies of the 1953 floods and Year 4 pupils have consolidated their report writing through their work on an Indian village. In addition, research and writing skills are well consolidated in history lessons.

11. Skills in speaking and listening have improved, but remain weak overall. Many pupils have a limited vocabulary, and teaching places due emphasis on developing their speaking skills through structured opportunities for them to articulate and share their ideas in pairs and small groups. In lessons, some effective questioning and a good variety of discussions developed the pupils' speaking and listening skills well.

12. Standards in numeracy lessons are close to those expected for the age of the pupils. Their number skills are appropriate, although some make basic errors in calculation and many have limited skills in handling data. The pupils' use of mathematical vocabulary is inconsistent and most lacked the confidence to explain their calculations in front of the whole class. However, pupils in Year 7 responded positively to challenging questioning to give accurate and well-articulated responses that demonstrated a sound understanding of proportion. The school has made good use of the National Numeracy Strategy and materials derived from it to help to raise standards. The school's analysis of the results of optional tests indicates that Year 7 pupils have made good progress in mathematics.

13. Most pupils are making reasonable gains in their knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts and processes. Science teaching covers a suitable range of topics and lessons include a variety of practical explorations. In addition, science lessons include an interesting range of demonstrations by the teachers that stimulate the pupils' curiosity about

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and understanding of scientific processes. In one Year 7 lesson, for example, the teacher took the opportunity to show pupils the shadow image of Venus, while in another the movement of particles was cleverly modelled using simple equipment. In general, the pupils showed a sound knowledge and understanding of the topics covered. Year 5 pupils recalled well their prior work on pollination and applied their understanding to identify the component parts of a model plant. However, there were evident weaknesses in the pupils' investigative skills, notably in the recording and interpretation of data and in higher-order skills of prediction, evaluation and application of learning. Observations and written conclusions are generally accurate, but explanations are often superficial and do not make sufficient use of scientific terminology to explain key processes. The spelling of key words is often poor.

14. The pupils' standards in ICT are at the level expected for their age. They demonstrate appropriate skills. The school is beginning to develop the use of ICT across the different subjects of the curriculum. Year 4 pupils made good use of ICT to research, organise and present information on the Saxons. ICT programs are well used to support pupils who have special educational needs, and those targeted for additional literacy support.

### **The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

15. The pupils behave well and in general have positive attitudes to learning. Around the school, during break periods and in the lunch hall they were friendly, polite and they interacted sensibly. Attitudes and behaviour were at least satisfactory in 16 of the 17 lessons, including six in which they were good. Behaviour was good in assembly. There is a settled climate for learning in lessons. The teachers have a positive approach to the management of behaviour and agreed sanctions are applied consistently. The adults in the school present good role models. Relationships between pupils, and between pupils and adults, are generally good.

16. In all lessons the pupils settled quickly to their work. The majority applied themselves to their learning, showed interest in what they were doing and sustained their concentration well. When asked to work in pairs or small groups they collaborated productively. However, the pupils' capacity to work independently is underdeveloped, although opportunities for them to do this are increasing. Furthermore, a small but significant number of pupils have poor work habits. When they start in Year 4, many pupils have poor concentration skills and do not listen carefully to instructions. The school effectively addresses these weaknesses by implementing consistent routines and by planning work that presents pupils with a good variety of types of learning. Attitudes to learning are good overall in Key Stage 2. However, in Year 7 there remains a legacy of neutral attitudes, notably amongst boys. A significant number of pupils have low levels of self-esteem and are reticent learners. The most effective teaching recognises the need to build the pupils' confidence and skilfully addresses these issues.

17. The school provides the pupils with extensive support and guidance and successfully promotes good attitudes and behaviour through a range of suitable rewards and sanctions. The rewards include merits and commendations. This public recognition of good conduct is popular with the pupils and has clarified and raised the school's expectations. Stepped sanctions are consistently applied by staff. The school keeps suitable records and parents are properly informed about incidents of misbehaviour. The school's policy for behaviour and discipline is effective and has led to significant improvement.; for example, the proportion of the pupils receiving the school's sanction of a 'red card' in the past school year has declined

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by 50 per cent. Strategies for managing extreme behaviour, such as the use of pastoral support programmes (PSPs), have proved successful in the case of targeted pupils.

18. The number of fixed-term exclusions has risen overall since the last inspection. At the end of the autumn term 2003 the headteacher took effective action to redress the deteriorating behaviour of a small group of Year 7 boys. This has now stabilised and there have been no exclusions since January 2004.

19. Attendance for the school year so far is 93.47 per cent. This is an improvement on the previous year, but is just below the national median. Unauthorised absence is in line with national figures. The school procedures to ensure good attendance are sound. Punctuality is satisfactory.

20. Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is satisfactory and the pupils' development in these areas is sound and at times good. Assemblies cultivate a sense of community and introduce pupils to a range of moral and cultural issues. The well-judged discussion of a story in assembly introduced the pupils to 'refugee week' and encouraged them to empathise with the character portrayed. Most assemblies contain appropriate and well-observed periods of reflection. They meet statutory requirements, but opportunities to contribute to the pupils' spiritual development are missed. A wide range of cultural opportunities are derived from the programmes of study, notably in art. In addition, the school enriches the pupils' learning through a good range of extracurricular activities, trips and residential opportunities; for example, the Year 4 pupils' visit to a Saxon village stimulated a very good response, and they learned about life in India's Niligri Hills at first hand from a visiting speaker.

21. The school has taken positive steps to improve the social climate and relationships. The pupils are encouraged to assume responsibility, for example as representatives on the school council, as house captains and in making presentations in assembly. The school council allows pupils to contribute to the organisation of the school. Good-quality displays of pupils' work, including some excellent art work in the style of famous artists, are prominently displayed in classrooms and public areas of the school. These brighten the corridors and stairwells; contribute powerfully to a celebratory ethos; and encourage the pupils to value their environment. Midday supervisors have been trained to organise playground games for the pupils, and take responsibility for encouraging positive interaction. The breakfast club is well attended and provides a good start to the school day for many pupils.

### **The quality of education**

22. The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection. It is sound overall, with notable strengths. Teaching was at least satisfactory in 16 lessons and good or very good in six. Lesson-planning has improved and is often good. In most lessons the pupils' work was suitably guided by learning objectives that were effectively shared with the class. There was a consistent approach to the management of behaviour and a settled climate for learning in almost all lessons. In general, relationships between adults and pupils were good, teachers explained work carefully and learning was well managed. Lessons had a better balance of input from the teacher and independent learning, and a wider variety of learning activities was planned. In several lessons, specific tasks engaged the pupils actively in learning. In a Year 5 science lesson, for example, the pollination of plants by insects was cleverly simulated so that the pupils could better understand the process. The physical 'brain

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gym' exercises that are an integral part of teaching in Year 4 have had a positive impact on the pupils' attitudes to learning: exercise routines usefully refocus the pupils' attention and enable them to sustain their concentration for extended periods of time. Learning assistants provided good support for individual pupils and small groups.

23. In the best lessons, planning set ambitious outcomes and teaching was confident, brisk and purposeful in directing the pupils' learning. In these lessons, the teachers explained or modelled work well, so that the pupils understood what was expected and could move quickly onto independent tasks. When teaching was lively and challenging the pupils made good progress. Some teachers modelled questioning very well: in a Year 7 mathematics lesson the teacher's skilful questions engaged all the pupils, assessed their understanding and challenged them to think more deeply about the work. In the best lessons, the careful matching of tasks to the pupils' different abilities and the skilful management of learning ensured that all made rapid progress; concluding plenary sessions were well used to assess the gains that had been made.

24. There remain some weaknesses in teaching, even in lessons that were satisfactory overall. Weaker teaching was suitably planned, but unclear exposition left some pupils confused about the purpose of their work or the tasks to be completed. When questioning was too closed or unstructured, the pupils were not encouraged to participate or apply their previous learning. In a few lessons they were allowed to shout answers, and discussions were dominated by a small minority.

25. The curriculum is broad and includes all subjects in reasonable depth and balance. The school exploits a few good-quality extracurricular opportunities, including trips and visiting speakers, in order to extend and enrich the curriculum. The diversity and quality of much of the art work are a strength of the school. The work of an interesting range of artists is studied; pupils in Year 4 have enjoyed reproducing the work of Milton Avery as well as developing their own skills in observational drawing.

26. Provision for the pupils who have special educational needs is satisfactory. There is good, in-class support for individual pupils and for small groups. The school makes appropriate use of the support materials derived from national strategies and has developed an effective system for early intervention. Assessment data is used to identify pupils who are underachieving and they are given additional support. The steady decline in the number of pupils on the special educational needs register is the result of these measures.

27. The whole-school system for assessment is sound. Pupils' progress is assessed and recorded in English and mathematics on a termly basis. The results are analysed against prior attainment and underachieving pupils are identified. Class teachers use assessment data effectively to analyse the causes of underachievement and to plan strategies to address these. Assessment procedures are developing reasonably well in other subjects: there is a simple system for recording the pupils' progress, with end-of-unit assessment sheets for subjects other than English and mathematics. However, subject co-ordinators in these curriculum areas do not have a clear overview of the pupils' progress or their areas of weakness.

28. The quality of marking has improved and is often good. The most effective is thorough and diagnostic. At best, the teachers' written comments make clear links with the pupils' individual targets and guide improvement by setting specific short-term goals. Recent initiatives to promote self-evaluation by the pupils have been good. Group marking of the

Sutton Hoo projects by Year 4 pupils was well structured and encouraged the pupils to reflect on the historical and presentational skills that they needed to develop and demonstrate.

29. Communication between school and home has improved significantly. The school has taken appropriate steps to inform and involve parents, and the quality of information provided is good. Parents receive information about their children's attendance and behaviour, and what they are studying. They are also given good opportunities to observe the pupils' work at first hand: Year 4 pupils recently performed a 'myths and legends' evening, and open mornings are held termly to enable parents to observe the school in session. In addition, parents have been invited to information evenings for end-of-key stage tests and a mathematics workshop.

### **Leadership and management**

30. The headteacher provides good management and sound leadership for the school: his leadership has strengthened since the last inspection and is now self-assured. There are good systems for evaluating the work of the school and these inform development planning well. Monitoring procedures are suitably underpinned by school policies, and are used to set suitable aspirations and to gauge progress. The headteacher has a clear overview of the strengths and remaining weaknesses in teaching and has been decisive in addressing problems that have arisen. He has effectively conveyed his expectations to all staff and has used individual discussions to guide improvements in teaching and curriculum management. The headteacher communicates well with the governing body: individual meetings with governors have ensured that they are well informed about the school's progress.

31. The deputy headteacher has supported the headteacher well and has provided good leadership on key areas of school improvement. The senior management team is cohesive. It has extended its monitoring role and is evaluative in identifying priorities for development. The school improvement plan is sound and outlines a suitable range of actions to address the issues identified.

32. The subject co-ordinators for English and mathematics provide good curriculum leadership. Their detailed analysis of the pupils' attainment in non-statutory tests has informed planned actions and the impact of these has been carefully evaluated. Developments in literacy and numeracy are suitably guided by subject action plans. The roles of other curriculum managers, including year team leaders, have developed well: they are better informed about the pupils' progress and areas for development; they respond positively when asked to fulfil management roles or to provide specialist subject advice; and they provide good support for new staff. However, there remains too much variation between the effectiveness of subject leaders and the pace and rigour with which they undertake their responsibilities.

33. The governing body is very well led and managed and has a clear understanding of its roles and responsibilities. The chair of governors provides a good balance of support and challenge. Governors are well informed about the school's progress and effectively hold the school to account.

34. The LEA has provided high levels of support and has monitored the school's progress regularly. Support for the headteacher has been well judged and suitably focused. Curriculum advice and guidance for subject leaders have been good. This support has had a

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significant impact on the capacity of the school's leadership and management and on the overall quality of teaching.

### **Implementation of the action plan**

35. The inspection report of December 2002 required the school to address seven key issues. These principally related to: raising standards; improving the quality of teaching and learning; improving the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; improving leadership and management; improving monitoring systems; improving links with parents; and improving procedures for health and safety. The school has implemented each of the tasks set out in its action plan and has made good progress overall in addressing these key issues. However, there remains work to be done to continue to improve the quality of teaching in order to accelerate pupils' rates of progress and further raise their standards of attainment.

36. The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The headteacher's personal action plan has successfully promoted a more reflective and proactive approach to management. The roles of subject co-ordinators have developed well and, although their effectiveness is variable, they provide sound curriculum management. Responsibilities have been suitably delegated and monitoring systems ensure that the school is well placed to evaluate its own performance and guide its own improvement.

37. Training and support for the staff have been well targeted, and weaknesses in teaching have been systematically and robustly addressed. The overall quality of teaching has improved significantly and is satisfactory overall. There are common procedures for lesson-planning and the management of the pupils, and effective systems for monitoring the quality of teaching.

38. The school's ethos has improved considerably and is now satisfactory. The pupils are well behaved and in general have positive attitudes to learning. The school has worked hard to improve communication with parents and to involve them more closely in their children's education. Links with parents have strengthened; this work has steadily improved parental perceptions and raised the profile of the school in the local community.

39. As a result of LEA support and the school's efforts, the pupils make at least satisfactory and often good progress, and standards of attainment have risen significantly.

## **Appendix – Information about the inspection**

The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in December 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in June and November 2003, and in March 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of December 2002.

In June 2004, two HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Seventeen lessons or parts of lessons, one assembly and two registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunch times and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff and subject co-ordinators for literacy and science, the chair of governors and two representatives from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of December 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.