

Thriplow CofE VA Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110835
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	310434
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Colin Henderson

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	91
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	12
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sharon McGinty
Headteacher	Mrs Petrina Lodge
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	School Lane Thriplow Royston Hertfordshire SG8 7RH
Telephone number	01763 208 213
Fax number	01763 209 072

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2008
Inspection number	310434

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Children come from the local village and other villages in the surrounding area. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds is below average and all speak English as their first language. The number of pupils who finding learning difficult for an identified reason is well above average for a school of this size. Many of these pupils have specific or severe learning difficulties. The attainment on entry of children starting in the Early Years Foundation Stage is broadly typical of children nationally, although it varies considerably over time because of the small numbers in each year group. Pupil mobility is high, especially in Years 3 and 4, as some pupils move to private education and others move in from a nearby village in an adjoining county. There is an on-site pre-school and a breakfast club, which are not managed by the governing body, and an after-school club that is. The school has received the Healthy Schools Award and the Active Mark.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

'The enthusiasm and commitment of staff are palpable and infectious - having a very positive effect on our children's education and self-esteem'. This is one of many positive comments given by pupils and parents and clearly shows how highly this school is valued. Such remarks reflect accurately that it is indeed a good school. Several parents said they had chosen to send their children to it because '...they benefit hugely from a safe, caring, Christian environment'. As a result, pupils achieve well as they feel happy, benefit from good teaching and greatly enjoy a good range of learning activities.

The good leadership and management, as shown in the clear, accurate and purposeful evaluations made by the headteacher, focus consistently on improving the school. She manages her staff successfully and encourages them to contribute to an effective team approach. This process fully involves the influential and effective governing body, which ensures the school is good value for money. The staff has an accurate picture of how well the school is doing in English and mathematics, because of good procedures to track the progress of individuals and groups of pupils. These are used well to improve the achievement of any pupils who are not maintaining the expected progress in these subjects, although the tracking is not developed as well in science and other subjects. The excellent partnership that the school has with parents helps support pupils in their learning, for example, to improve their reading skills.

Children settle quickly and happily into the Ants class because of the welcoming and caring atmosphere within the school. They, and their parents, particularly value the buddy system in which groups of pupils from each year group take lunch together and meet for shared reading activities. Older pupils are excellent at nurturing the younger ones in their care. This encourages a strong sense of communal identity and improves self-esteem. Pupils' outstanding personal development is a key factor in supporting their good achievement. They speak enthusiastically about their school and behave outstandingly well in lessons and around the school. Year 6 pupils enjoy taking responsibilities, for example, some help at lunchtimes to set the hall out for assemblies. School councillors talk proudly about their work, such as improving outdoor facilities and equipment and generally improving their school.

Achievement is good throughout the school. Pupils reach above average standards in English and mathematics at the end of Years 2 and 6 in assessments and national tests. Attainment varies from year to year, largely because of the impact of small numbers in each year group. Standards in reading are often well above average. Those in science are broadly average because pupils' investigative skills are not good enough. Many older pupils have had too few opportunities to apply these skills. The headteacher is aware of this weakness and it is a target for improvement. Pupils who find learning difficult benefit from effective support from teaching and support staff. This helps them to make good progress towards their learning targets. Some individuals with behavioural and emotional difficulties make excellent progress. Pupils achieve above expected standards in some other subjects. In music, for example, the quality of singing is excellent.

Pupils are enthusiastic in their approach to learning. They enjoy a broad range of learning activities very much, especially sporting and musical, and value the opportunities to learn a foreign language, such as Italian. Pupils concentrate well and are keen to achieve the point of the lesson, which is always set out clearly. Teaching is consistently good, with some outstanding features. Teachers plan in detail to match activities to the wide range of different learning

needs in the mixed-age and mixed ability classes. They manage their classes excellently and make very effective use of interactive whiteboards to make lessons interesting, involving pupils successfully in their learning. Some teachers make good use of different ways of evaluating the learning and helping pupils improve their work. For example, in some teaching, especially in literacy and numeracy, pupil self-assessment, marking and improvement targets help to raise pupils' achievement very successfully. However, this is not consistent across the school.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make a good start to their school life because of the outstanding care, good teaching and the interesting range of well-organised activities. Children love being at this school and talk excitedly about what they are doing, especially in their buddy groups. The teacher, working successfully with her effective teaching assistant, has created a positive learning atmosphere in which everyone cares for each other and is very keen to do well. Children adjust very quickly to working and playing with others and respond very well to the staff's clear expectations. The teacher plans in detail to provide good opportunities in each area of learning, linking them together successfully. Effective use is made of the excellent new outdoor provision. Staff use questions well to encourage children to share their ideas. However, sometimes opportunities to extend children's language and number skills are not developed fully, such as when working with sand and other materials.

Parents are very appreciative of the excellent way in which their children have settled into school. One parent commented, 'Everyone seems to be happy there, which makes for a great environment to have fun and learn'. The effective balance between adult-directed and children's choice of activities, supported by good on-going assessment, ensures that children make good progress in all areas of learning. Most attain the goals expected nationally by the time they enter Year 1, and some exceed them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in science by improving pupils' investigative skills, particularly in Years 5 and 6.
- Extend good practice so that all pupils know what they need to do to improve their work.
- Develop the tracking procedures to establish a comprehensive programme for monitoring and raising attainment, particularly in science.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are above average overall, although high levels of mobility in the small numbers of pupils in each year result in some yearly variations in test results. Reading standards are well above average because of the good teaching of key skills and an excellent partnership with parents to support their children's learning. A recent focus on writing is improving standards and more pupils are attaining above nationally expected levels. Standards in science at the end of Year 6 are lower than those in English and mathematics, because the investigative skills of older pupils are not developed enough. Although teachers introduce these skills effectively to younger pupils, older ones have too few opportunities to extend these skills, which limits their attainment. The very good range of learning opportunities encourages pupils' concentration. Those with particular gifts and talents are helped to extend their skills to a high standard. This is especially so in music and information and communication technology (ICT).

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

A high priority is placed on pupils' personal development. This helps individual pupils to enjoy school thoroughly and to attend regularly. Pupils contribute highly effectively to the school and wider communities. The consistent focus and high profile given to the school's Acrostic helps to promote such values as trust and respect. This strong ethos underpins a vibrant community. Pupils know that they are cared for and feel safe and happy in school. Their knowledge of how to lead safe and healthy lifestyles is excellent, especially regarding the importance of regular exercise. Many commented on the valuable visit to the 'Life Education Bus'. This provision helped their understanding of such matters as drugs and medicines. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. There are very strong links with the local church and with a hospital in Malawi. Effective links with a local plant breeding company help pupils to prepare for their futures, and offers them an insight into how businesses operate.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers plan lessons carefully to meet pupils' different learning needs. They work successfully with effective teaching assistants, particularly when supporting pupils with behavioural and emotional difficulties. Teachers use resources, such as interactive whiteboards, very effectively. As a result, they hold pupils' attention and stimulate their learning as, for example, when extending their reading skills. Some teachers encourage pupils to assess how well they have understood a particular skill or idea, for example in mathematics lessons. They use this good practice to guide their teaching and help those pupils who have had difficulties more effectively. On these occasions, teaching and learning improve well. However, such procedures are not used consistently across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum provides a broad range of learning activities to encourage all pupils to participate and extend their skills and knowledge. Careful planning meets pupils' different needs and ensures that all are included fully in lessons, some with the help and guidance of very effective support staff. Improved resources enable pupils to apply their ICT skills effectively in many subjects. Planning in science does not ensure that scientific skills are built successfully on prior learning. The curriculum is enriched through the inclusion of Italian and French lessons, an extended day programme and excellent opportunities to develop musical, sporting and writing skills, for example, when producing The Thriplow Times.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Teachers and support staff provide high quality individual personal care and support. This is highly valued by parents and pupils. There are secure systems for ensuring pupils' safety and protection. Pupils say that any bullying or harassment is very rare. Teachers deal seriously with any concerns that pupils raise. Younger ones particularly value talking to their older buddies

if they have a worry. Teaching and support staff work very successfully together to ensure that pupils receive the support that they need, particularly those who find learning hard. While teachers mark their pupils' work regularly, guidance about the next step to take is not offered consistently.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides strong and purposeful leadership that is valued highly by parents. A typical comment stated '...an excellent head who is very focused on the needs of the individual child'. She is supported well by a strong, cohesive team of staff and governors. Together they have established a vibrant school community in which pupils have a strong sense of belonging. They help to contribute outstandingly well to build the community together, for example, through the Daffodil weekend and links abroad. The headteacher is developing effective procedures for checking and then improving the school's performance. An example is the increased confidence of staff in using assessments to track each pupil carefully and to set challenging improvement targets in English and mathematics. They have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses in these subjects, but less so in science. The school development plan provides a clear direction for improvement and how actions to tackle weaknesses will be measured. This is raising standards, for example in writing, and is evidence of the school's good capacity to improve. Funds are targeted carefully to ensure good value for money. Subject leaders improve provision in their subjects successfully. They gather their information from scrutinising teachers' planning and collecting samples of pupils' work. Opportunities for them to evaluate classroom practice directly are, however, infrequent.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

14 November 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Thriplow CofE VA Primary School, Royston, SG8 7RH

Thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed talking to you about what you do in school, looking at your work and watching you learn. You clearly enjoy school very much and, together with your parents, you think that it is a good school - I agree.

I was pleased to see how well you get on together and you are really proud of your school. Your behaviour is excellent and this means that teachers can get on with the job of helping you learn. It was interesting to talk to school councillors about how they are helping to improve the school. I was particularly interested to hear from some Year 6 pupils about how you care for each other, for example, in your 'buddy groups'.

You told me that you learn a lot in school and enjoy your work, especially the many interesting extra-curricular activities. You are all making good progress in your lessons. This is because your teachers make lessons interesting and you try hard to do what your teachers ask. Your headteacher and the staff are trying to help you learn as well as possible and are making careful checks on your progress in English and mathematics. I have asked them to check on your progress more closely in some other subjects, such as science.

You are keen to achieve your learning targets in literacy and numeracy. For some of you, teachers' marking contains suggestions of ways to improve your work. I have asked that all of you should benefit from this type of guidance. I have also asked your teachers to help pupils in Years 5 and 6 use their skills in scientific investigations more often - I know that they will enjoy this and will work hard to improve their work in science.

Thank you again for helping me to find out about your school and I hope that you will continue to be happy and to work hard.

Yours sincerely

Colin Henderson

Lead inspector