

Whaley Thorns Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112793
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	311007
Inspection dates	18–19 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Trevor Watts

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	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	145
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	32
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Alison Warmall
Headteacher	Mrs K Walker
Date of previous school inspection	4 May 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Portland Road Langwith Mansfield Nottinghamshire NG20 9HB
Telephone number	01623 742604
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Whaley Thorns is a small primary school in a former mining village not far from Mansfield. It has Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision that comprises a mixed age class for children of Nursery and Reception age. The area is one of relatively high social and economic disadvantage, and a high proportion (about half) of pupils is entitled to free school meals. Almost all pupils are of a White British heritage, and numbers who find learning difficult, are high. The number on roll is declining. The school has the Activemark and Healthy Schools awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school which has improved well since the previous inspection. Pupils like the school very much; 'We wouldn't change anything at all,' agreed one group. They enjoy taking responsibility in school and in the local community, and have many opportunities to do so. The school makes good efforts to encourage pupils to attend more frequently. Although attendance is improving, it remains only satisfactory. Pupils learn how to live healthy and safe lives, and they develop a good level of confidence.

Many children enter the Nursery with skills that are well below the general level expected of children of this age. However, they get off to a flying start in the EYFS and continue to make good progress and achieve well as they grow through the school. By the time they leave Year 6, their standards of attainment in national tests for English, mathematics and science are broadly in line with the national average. The 2008 test results showed that boys' reading was below the national average at the end of Key Stage 1, and their writing was below at the end of Key Stage 2.

Good teaching stems from thorough assessment of pupils' progress and careful use of the information to adapt the planning of what will be taught, and how. The curriculum is outstanding. It is flexible and well balanced, with many extras packed into it, both in school time and out of school in the local area. Pupils are well cared for. They feel safe in school, and much is done to guide and support them in their academic learning and their social development. One parent wrote, 'I have been extremely happy with the progress my child has made and he genuinely enjoys attending school.'

The improvement in the school has come about because of the well-chosen developments planned by school leaders since the previous inspection. This process continues apace. The headteacher is presently seconded to the local authority, and the deputy headteacher is now the acting head for a year. This has provided the opportunity to give other staff greater responsibilities and develop their leadership and management skills. In turn, this is reinforcing the school's good capacity to continue improving.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The education in the EYFS is strong. Lessons are enriched by a well-planned range of experiences that children find interesting and exciting, including many activities that children can take part in outside. Some activities involve 'free exploration' such as 'painting' the fence or riding their cars and trikes, while others are more guided, such as learning to write, read or manipulate building toys. Reception age children have a literacy and numeracy session each day which leads them very well into the ways of the main school.

Teachers put maximum effort into developing the areas in which children have the lowest levels of skill. This results in rapid progress in children's social, personal and emotional skills, and in their ability to communicate with staff and with each other. Progress is carefully charted. By the time children leave the unit, they are achieving closer to the level generally expected of children of this age, with the most significant lag being in writing. Staff have very friendly relationships with children, but also expect much of them in terms of listening, sharing and taking turns - and all the other skills necessary to become the bright and eager learners that they are.

Parents are well involved, acting as volunteers for reading and play groups, accompanying trips out, and helping with learning spellings, numbers and colours at home. The unit is well managed and led, with very good teamwork. For example, all staff take responsibilities, lead groups, assess progress and contribute to planning the lessons for the following weeks and months.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English, particularly for boys' reading and writing.
- Raise the level of attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

National tests in English, mathematics and science confirm accurate school evidence that pupils' progress is good. In the 2008 tests, Key Stage 1 pupils achieved average standards overall, except for reading by boys. Conversely, Key Stage 2 national tests showed boys were achieving average standards in all areas except writing. This represents good achievement by pupils from their low starting points. Pupils' progress in other subjects such as art, physical education and information and communication technology (ICT) is also good.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make outstanding progress because of the very good support that they receive in lessons from teachers and support staff, and in separate groups for reading, writing and mathematics, including a daily before-school mathematics club. This support ensured that in 2008, all pupils attained the expected levels for their age at both key stages. The achievements of some of the more able pupils were less strong and not all reached the higher levels of which they were capable. Staff studied the reasons for the weaker performances and have taken appropriate steps to avoid such disappointments in future. Current school information shows that these actions are working well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including their personal development is good. Pupils develop good awareness and understanding of other religions and cultures during visits to places of worship in nearby towns, and through visitors and events in school. They learn right from wrong at an early age in lessons and in assembly topics, as well as through the whole ethos of the school. They really enjoy their learning, although their attendance is only at a satisfactory level. Pupils behave well, and are adamant that bullying 'has been sorted out' in school. Many pupils take advantage of good opportunities to take responsibility in school, from helping in classes and assemblies to being active members of the school council. Some are 'playground pals', or 'reading buddies' with younger pupils. They contribute outstandingly to the local community through a host of activities such as clearing up scrubland and making sculptures in a local country park, running recycling and environmental protection events and putting on festivals and musical performances for local people throughout the year.

Through school initiatives such as the sports Activemark award, and the Healthy Schools Award, as well as a good personal, social and health education curriculum, pupils develop a good awareness of how to lead healthy lives, including being aware of dangers on the internet as well as drug misuse.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Friendly relationships combine with a challenging and expectant ethos. Lessons are well planned, prepared and structured, although sometimes teachers are too keen to explain everything instead of letting pupils have a go. Resources such as electronic whiteboards, reproduced newspaper pages and laptop computers are used well to enhance learning. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported because staff make good efforts to understand the reasons for any lack of progress. They then provide extra sessions, and work at an appropriately challenging level, with good support by many very capable support staff, parents and specialist staff from outside the school when required.

Teachers set clear targets in lessons and keep pupils informed of how well they are achieving in the long term. Responding especially to the 2008 national test results, teachers are striving to develop more exciting, practical and relevant activities, particularly to motivate learning by boys. Some more challenging activities are already successfully being provided for the most able pupils in order to raise their achievements.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is very well suited to the needs and interests of all pupils. There is a strong focus on English and mathematics every day. Some classes have separately taught sets which helps to provide more focused learning at specific levels of difficulty. Writing, particularly, is further developed by frequent practice in other lessons. Science is taught in an increasingly practical and investigative way, and ICT supports learning throughout the curriculum. The curriculum for personal, social, health and citizenship education has been recently reviewed and reorganised to form a very good basis for pupils' personal development. French is taught in Key Stage 2, and German is offered as an out-of-school club. Other well-attended clubs include fishing in local lakes, multi-sports and football clubs, gardening in the school's allotment, computing and mathematics. Pupils go on many trips to places and events of interest and challenge. These have recently included Creswell Crag, several farms, a 'build-it' event, a sports centre and a forest education centre. Some visits include residential stays at, for instance, an outdoor pursuits centre. Pupils' learning is further enhanced by visitors to the school, such as the fire, police and medical services, artists, musicians and theatre groups. Exchanges of staff with other schools, including the main secondary school that pupils transfer to, and careers days, help them to become well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There is a strong ethos of care and support in the school's provision. As one parent wrote, 'The school and teachers were a great support in a very emotional period of my children's life.' Regulations for child protection, and safeguarding pupils' health and safety are met. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour consistently well. Many outsiders support pupils' well-being, including nursing, church and educational agencies. Pupils feel valued in school; they look to their futures with well-placed confidence, being capable and independent learners with a good range of skills to rely on as their lives develop.

Teachers generally mark pupils' work in ways that help pupils to understand what they need to improve on. They assess pupils' progress, and mostly use the information well to plan and prepare appropriate work for the next phase of learning, especially in English and mathematics. In order to further develop the assessment system consistently throughout the school in all subjects, staff are currently having training that is being advanced by the local authority.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Senior staff demonstrate strong and purposeful leadership that has consistently been focused on raising standards. At the same time, they have encouraged pupils to become well-rounded learners who enjoy their education and know how to take best care of themselves. Following the previous inspection, clear plans were put in place to deal with weaknesses. Well-informed actions by senior staff, and the willing teamwork of teachers and non-teaching staff, have seen the plans coming to fruition. Staff have successfully raised standards of academic achievement, as well as pupils' personal accomplishments. The governors have been active and supportive in this role, holding school leaders to account when results have dipped, helping in some lessons, and managing the budget and premises well. Subjects are led by capable teachers whose management roles are developing well.

School leaders have an outstanding strategy for promoting the concept of the school community, and the togetherness of the local community within the wider world. This is a major strength of the school. Pupils are very aware of a wide range of global and national issues and the governing body is fully involved in promoting community cohesion at all levels. The school has very actively promoted innumerable initiatives such as 'Think Green' (a recycling, animal protection and environmental awareness project), support for a local museum and a heritage centre, and local initiatives to promote anti-smoking and a crime-free community. Leaders have created strong links with other schools, education partners and supporting agencies and this has brought a richness and variety to school life.

The good improvements since the previous inspection, the accurate self-assessment by the school, and the recent broadening of the senior leadership team all demonstrate the school's good capacity to improve further. The local authority has also supported school developments well. The school's improvement plan has already featured clear and practical ways of further raising the achievements of the more able pupils. In response to the recent test results, it also highlights ways to raise boys' attainments in reading and writing.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	2
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?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
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	3
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	1

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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?	1
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	2
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

20 November 2008

Dear Pupils

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

I'm sure you will remember when I visited your school recently, and came to your classes and assembly. I was very pleased to speak with you and your teachers. Thank you for talking with me and helping me.

I found that you go to a good school, and that you are rightly proud to be pupils here. You enjoy your lessons and all of the many extras that staff arrange for you to attend and be involved in. Some of you told me that you would not change a single thing in the school. However, some of you do not come to school as often as you should, and you are missing essential lessons. It is important that you and your parents make more effort to get you into school every day. You feel safe and very welcome in school. You learn about some of the dangers in life, but you also learn how to look after yourselves and lead healthy and safe lives.

You join in many excellent events around the school, the village, the park and the whole local environment. You make good progress in your work, right from the starting years in the Nursery and Reception classes up to the end of Year 6. Some of you who find the school work quite difficult are helped a lot, and because you work hard too, you do extremely well. Others find some of the work a bit easy, and I have asked your teachers to provide you with more difficult work. This is especially so with your reading and writing, particularly for the boys.

The staff in school all work very hard to make your learning both enjoyable and very worthwhile and I think they do a good job. The acting headteacher and her team of staff and governors are making sure that the school will continue to improve, as it has done in recent years.

My best wishes to everyone

Trevor Watts

Lead inspector