

Thameside Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123083
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	333444
Inspection dates	6–7 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Mike Thompson

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	144
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	36
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Farmer
Headteacher	Ms Sally-Anne Crowther
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2008
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Cotman Close Abingdon OX14 5NL
Telephone number	01235 527600
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Thameside is a smaller-than-average primary school on the southern outskirts of Abingdon. Almost all of its pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has increased in recent terms as the number on roll has risen, and is now just above the national average. Most of these pupils have either moderate learning difficulties, problems with speech, language and communication, or difficulty in controlling their behaviour. Typically, the youngest children are educated in the Early Years Foundation Stage Unit. However, at the time of the inspection, a small group of the oldest and most mature of these children was being taught alongside pupils in Year 1 because of the increased demand for places in the Unit. With the exception of the Early Years Foundation Stage Unit, all pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. At its last full inspection in January 2008, the school was judged to require special measures.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Nevertheless, in accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the achievement and progress of pupils and the quality of teaching and learning.

In contrast to the situation found at the time of the last inspection in January 2008, the school's leadership is now providing more effective, and satisfactory, direction and is demonstrating a satisfactory capacity to improve. The leadership team evaluates the work of the school accurately and has brought about a number of improvements. Although standards have risen, they are not yet high enough. Pupils are making better progress overall, but there remain significant pockets of underachievement, particularly among the more able pupils and those with learning difficulties. Pupils' behaviour is better. Most pupils are well behaved and the number of exclusions has halved. Systems for tracking the progress made by pupils have been significantly improved and enable managers to monitor the impact of provision far more effectively than previously.

Children continue to get a good start to their education in the Early Years Foundation Stage. When children join the school as three-year-olds, their levels of skills, knowledge and understanding are low in comparison to what is typical at this age. Despite the good progress made, most fall short of the goals expected of them by the time they move into Year 1. Between Years 1 and 6, pupils' progress slows and is inadequate overall. However, this overview masks considerable variations in the rates of progress made by different groups of pupils, which reflect inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. By the end of Year 6, standards are below average overall. The results of the most recent national tests, which have yet to be validated, show that the school is successful in ensuring that most pupils reach the nationally expected level in mathematics and science, but falls short of this goal in English. In all three subjects, there are too few pupils who achieve higher levels.

The senior leadership team has worked hard to improve the quality of teaching, and much has been achieved. However, teaching remains inadequate because it is not yet good enough to erode the backlog of underachievement and tackle the underachievement still evident in some classes. The teachers' expectations of what their more able pupils can achieve are not high enough, and the day-to-day help provided for pupils who are struggling to keep up could be better managed. Over the course of the past 18 months, the school has, of necessity, focused very strongly on improving pupils' levels of basic literacy and numeracy. It recognises that, as these skills are becoming embedded, it needs to place a greater emphasis on subjects other than English, mathematics, science, and information and communication technology (ICT). The care, guidance and support provided for pupils are satisfactory overall. There are significant strengths in the day-to-day pastoral care, but improvements are still needed in the quality of academic guidance given to pupils.

A key success of the school's senior leadership team has been to eliminate the culture of 'learned helplessness' among some of the pupils, which was evident during the first of the monitoring

visits, when the school was in special measures. Initiatives to develop pupils' independence in learning, and skills in evaluating their own progress are becoming embedded. Most aspects of pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. However, rates of attendance are below average and punctuality needs to be improved. In order to make significant inroads on tackling these issues, the school recognises that it has to develop better partnerships with parents as part of a drive to address significant inadequacies in its provision to promote community cohesion.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage Unit are keen to come to school, and are happy and settled. This is because they are well looked after, and because the unit leader provides the children with a rich diet of interesting and exciting activities that capture their imagination and hold their interest. For example, during the inspection, much of the learning enjoyed by the children stemmed from a theme of 'Mad Scientists'. The story of Flat Stanley captured their imagination and provided opportunities for them to develop early skills as writers and fine motor skills in using needle and thread to produce their interpretations of the character.

All areas of learning are covered well and there is a good balance between activities directed by adults and those chosen by the children, both indoors and out. A key element in the success of the unit is the good development of children's personal and social skills. As a result, children are confident, independent learners, and generally relate well to one another. The driving force behind the effective provision is the good leadership provided by the unit manager. She leads well by example, and demonstrates good skills in developing children's vocabulary through perceptive questioning and good modelling of correct speech. However, her teaching assistants are not as skilled, and sometimes do not use questioning as well as they might in order to develop children's learning. Similarly, the ongoing assessments made about children's levels of skills, knowledge and understanding are of better quality when made by the teacher. When teaching assistants record their observations, they demonstrate improving skills in judging how well the children are achieving, but are less effective in identifying the next steps in learning required. The greatest strengths of the teaching assistants are in ensuring that good attention is paid to the children's welfare and in providing extra help wherever it is needed.

Overall, the staff work very well together as a team. The more able children, who are working alongside pupils in Year 1, thrive on the challenges provided for them and make good progress. Over the past term, the school has made good improvements to the outdoor learning area provided for these children. By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, children's dispositions and attitudes, and their attainment in spoken language, linking sounds and letters, and calculation are all broadly in line with national expectations for children of their age. In most other areas of learning, attainment is below expectations, while in knowledge and understanding of the world and creative development it is low.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all groups of pupils make good progress, in order to raise standards to at least average levels, by improving the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better, with high levels of challenge for more able pupils and effective support for those with learning difficulties.
- Improve rates of attendance and punctuality through good partnerships with parents, resulting from the more effective promotion of community cohesion.

- Provide greater variety in the curriculum and ensure that subjects other than English, mathematics, science and ICT are given a higher profile.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Overall, the school has succeeded in its aim of ensuring that most pupils attain the levels expected for their age by the end of Years 2 and 6. However, standards remain below average overall because there are very few pupils who exceed these levels. In Year 2, for example, no pupil managed to reach Level 3. The school's good system for monitoring pupils' progress is now producing data that allow close scrutiny of the progress made by each individual on a termly basis. This is beginning to make a difference, as leaders and the local authority are better informed when they check on the quality of provision for individuals and groups. For example, the support provided by the local authority includes progress meetings at which local authority consultants discuss the profile of each pupil with class teachers. In some subjects and in some year groups, progress is now satisfactory and, in some instances, good. However, too many pockets of underachievement remain. Pupils with learning difficulties are generally not doing well enough. This is because the analysis of their learning needs is not always translated into precise targeted support to address these needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Almost all elements of pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Pupils have a sound understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and are aware of what they need to do to keep themselves and others safe from harm. The school has worked hard to develop pupils' personal and social skills by focusing closely on encouraging them to think more for themselves, make sensible choices, and take more ownership of their own learning. The results are seen, for example, in improved skills in problem solving in mathematics and in planning and carrying out investigations in science. However, the skills demonstrated by pupils in these areas are no better than satisfactory. The school is also making inroads into developing pupils' skills in contributing to its day-to-day life. The school council meets regularly, but its role is underdeveloped, largely because of the lack of maturity displayed by its older members. Pupils' preparation for the next phase of their education, and for a future as life-long learners, is inadequate. Their improved independence and social skills are outweighed by inadequate academic progress and the unsatisfactory attendance and punctuality of a small but significant minority.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Teachers are generally effective in managing the behaviour of their pupils and relationships between teachers and their pupils are usually good. In most cases, these combine to create a good climate for learning in lessons. However, this good climate does not always result in good learning because teachers' expectations of what their pupils can achieve, particularly the more able, are not consistently high enough. Occasionally, this leads to boredom and disruptive behaviour by a few pupils. Standards of presentation of work and handwriting are generally inadequate. Where teaching is well paced and demanding, it can generate high levels of interest

and enjoyment. For example, good subject knowledge in mathematics led to high levels of challenge that held pupils' attention as they used the outcomes of calculations to produce graphs. However, in too many instances, teaching is rather pedestrian and is pitched at the middle ability level. As such, it is ineffective in generating the good learning required to overcome the legacy of underachievement and enable all pupils to fulfil their potential.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The senior leadership team has made a number of improvements in provision that have been effective in helping raise basic standards in literacy and numeracy. For instance, the 'Rainbow Writers' initiative helps motivate pupils by celebrating achievements in writing. A wide range of enrichment activities helps motivate pupils and encourages them to appreciate the relevance of their learning in numeracy and literacy. For example, the recent Science Week, planned by senior managers, provided many opportunities for pupils to investigate, solve problems and apply skills learned in other subjects. A number of pupils spoke to inspectors enthusiastically about the many investigations they enjoyed. One of these involved solving the problem: Do people with bigger thumbs take longer to do up buttons? In answering this, pupils needed to use skills in measuring, graphing and writing. The task also helped to develop their understanding of the scientific method. Pupils benefit from visits to places of interest, including two residential trips for pupils in Year 6. Teachers and teaching assistants organise a wide range of clubs that are well attended and cater for pupils in all year groups. Specialist teaching in ICT helps ensure that pupils make good progress in developing their skills. However, the school acknowledges the need to develop more cross-curricular themes and, through this, to raise the profile of subjects other than English, mathematics and science.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school is effective in ensuring the care and welfare of the pupils. All legal requirements are met in respect of child protection and health and safety. Procedures for checking the suitability of adults who work with children are secure. Actions, such as the 'late gate' initiative introduced by senior managers, have been effective in improving punctuality. However, the poor attendance of children from a small proportion of families continues to affect the school's overall performance adversely. The success of ideas, such as the 'late gate' and the Early Years Foundation Stage leader's good development of links with the local pre-school and parents, demonstrate that, where effort is put in, many parents respond positively. This shows that there is the potential for further improvement. The academic guidance provided for pupils has improved since the last inspection but is inconsistent. In lessons, some good guidance is given through teachers' dialogue with pupils, but on too many occasions opportunities to develop learning are missed. Teachers' marking of pupils' work has also improved. The 'Tickled pink and green to grow' scheme for marking has become embedded over the course of the last year and is beginning to help raise standards. Increasingly, there is evidence that the developmental comments appended to pupils' work in green ink are being acted on by them. For example, corrections are now used more often as a tool for improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The senior management team, comprising the headteacher and an advanced skills teacher, who will take on the role of assistant headteacher from the start of the new academic year, have complementary strengths. They share a clear vision of what needs to be done to improve the school further. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation are hallmarks of their partnership. The way in which they have helped develop the skills of middle managers is beginning to show results. Middle managers are more confident than they were, because they are better informed through the training they have received, and they are beginning to hold staff to account for the performance of their pupils. Governance is satisfactory. Governors provide useful support and challenge for the school. However, there are three vacancies for parent governors, and the workload is, therefore, carried by too few people. A significant weakness within the leadership and management of the school is the inadequate promotion of community cohesion. The school is in the early stages of developing links within the local community and in providing pupils with a global perspective. Governors have no clear strategy for the development of community cohesion at this point.

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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?	4
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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	4

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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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?	Yes

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

16 September 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thameside Primary School, Abingdon, OX14 5NL

As many of you know, I have been visiting your school each term for more than a year to check on how well it is getting on. This is because an inspector who came in 2008 decided that your school was not good enough and said that it needed something called 'special measures'. This means that it needed lots of extra help to get better.

I am pleased to tell you that your school has improved a lot and so I have decided that it no longer needs special measures. You already know this, because lots of you have told me about the more interesting lessons and exciting events, such as your Science Week. Your school still needs to do more to make sure that you get the education that you deserve, so I have decided that it now needs something called a 'notice to improve'. This means that it will get a bit of extra help, but not as much as before. I have asked your school to do the following things, because I think these will help you most.

- Make sure that you make better progress so that the standard of your work is even better.
- Make sure that teachers give you even harder work to do in lessons, particularly those of you who sometimes find it too easy - I'm sure that you are ready for this challenge! The school also needs to give better help to those of you who sometimes struggle to understand what you have to do, so that you can do your work more easily.
- Make lots more links with the local community and help you to understand more about how important it is to be good members of the community. I also want the school to make sure that more of you come to school regularly and on time. You and your parents need to play your part!
- Make sure that you have more opportunities to enjoy subjects such as history, geography and art.

There are a number of things that I like about your school. For example, all the adults who work in your school take good care of you - but then you already know that! In particular, I would like to congratulate you on your good behaviour - keep it up! I know that there are some of you who find it hard to behave well all of the time, but most of you get on well with each other. I would also like to thank you for making me feel so welcome. This is because everyone at your school is very friendly.

I wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Mike Thompson

Lead Inspector