

Thornhill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106849
Local Authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	336753
Inspection dates	10–11 February 2010
Reporting inspector	John Rutherford HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	238
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs V Whitehead
Headteacher	Mrs Amanda Benton
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. The inspectors spent 45% of their time looking at learning, visiting 14 lessons and observing nine teachers and four teaching assistants. They held meetings with senior and middle leaders, governors, the School Improvement Partner, groups of pupils and a small number of parents. They observed the school's work and looked at pupils' books, information about pupils' progress and attendance, evaluation reports, improvement plans and many other management documents. Inspectors also analysed 154 questionnaires from parents, 105 from pupils in Key Stage 2 and 33 from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the school's use of assessment and its impact on the progress of all groups of pupils
- the effectiveness of the school's actions to improve attendance
- the school's evaluation of its work to improve community cohesion
- the quality of provision and children's outcome in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Information about the school

This is an average size school serving an area near the centre of Rotherham. A third of the pupils are eligible for a free school meal, which is well above average. A quarter of the pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Two-thirds of the pupils are from a minority ethnic background, which is very high compared to most schools, and many require additional support for learning English. The Early Years Foundation Stage provision comprises a Nursery class and two Reception classes. The school has gained a number of awards for the teaching of basic skills and for promoting healthy living, sports, arts, enterprise and political understanding.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding school. The quality of provision and standards have improved considerably since the previous inspection because of the headteacher's exceptional leadership. With very strong support from her senior leadership team, she has introduced a strategy which enables the school to meet its aim that 'no pupil underachieves'. The driving force of the strategy is a very effective system for keeping the progress of all groups of pupils under close review and providing carefully planned support for any who fall behind. As a result, the very large majority of pupils make good progress from their very low starting points and leave Year 6 with broadly average standards in English, mathematics and science. Progress is equally good for all groups of pupils, including those whose first language is not English and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The headteacher makes systematic provision for teachers and pastoral staff to develop their leadership skills, particularly in evaluating pupils' outcomes and improving provision where required. The effectiveness of this work gives the school an outstanding capacity to carry on improving standards. Recent staffing changes have left the Early Years Foundation Stage without an experienced leader. The headteacher provides effective overall direction, but there is insufficient day-to-day coordination and supervision of the adults working across the unit. This reduces the overall impact of the effective teaching, as activities occasionally lack a clear focus on learning new skills.

The quality of teaching is consistently good throughout the school. Key strengths are teachers' high expectations and very interesting lessons. Teaching is not outstanding because there is not always sufficient provision for pupils to learn independently. This reduces the opportunity for teachers and teaching assistants to assess accurately whether their pupils are improving their understanding and skills during lessons.

The provision for pupils' personal education and well-being is very effective and leads to outstanding achievement in learning how to be healthy, how to contribute to improving the lives of others and how to live harmoniously with people from different backgrounds. The school uses a wide range of strategies to improve attendance. These are effective and while attendance is still low, it is improving rapidly and closing in on the national average. There is a particularly notable success in reducing persistent absenteeism. Staff are just beginning to involve the school council in planning how to reduce absence further. The school has a very strong relationship with all groups of parents and is at an early stage of engaging some of these parents to plan ways to promote good attendance to every family.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To continue raising standards the school should:
- improve the quality of teaching from good to outstanding, by:
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to learn independently
 - systematically assessing pupils' understanding while learning independently, to ensure that their work is helping them to accelerate their progress.
- improve children's outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage from good to outstanding by ensuring there is clear day-to-day leadership for organising provision across the three classes.
- reduce absence by greater involvement of pupils and parents in promoting good attendance.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Standards have improved rapidly over the last three years from well below average to average. This is because of the school's relentless focus on meeting the learning needs of every pupil. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those whose first language is not English achieve well in whole-class lessons. This is because they receive effective support from teachers and teaching assistants which enables them to make good progress towards the same objectives as the other pupils. When working in small groups away from the class, they make good progress in learning basic skills because they are given a wide range of enjoyable tasks, often including physical activities. Higher attaining pupils achieve well because they receive suitably challenging work in lessons.

Pupils' conscientious attitudes and good behaviour make a strong contribution to their progress. Very interesting, real-life enterprise activities extend pupils' mathematical knowledge as well as helping them to make very good progress in developing skills for their future economic well-being. Through the curriculum and direct contact with schools abroad, pupils develop a very good understanding of other cultures. They also learn much about how to make a helpful contribution to people who need assistance, other than simply giving them money.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Lessons have a sharp focus and teachers regularly recap with pupils what they are working towards in order to consolidate their understanding. Everyday situations and practical activities are used to increase pupils' interest. The pace of lessons is good although, occasionally, teachers do not make enough time to check that pupils have grasped new ideas fully. In most classes, marking helps pupils to improve their progress towards their targets.

The curriculum has improved significantly since it was identified as a priority for improvement in the previous inspection. It links subjects into interesting themes which are very well planned to ensure that pupils can make good progress in a wide range of subjects. A particular strength is the way in which mathematics and English are woven into the themes, as well as being taught separately. The school provides a very rich programme of extra-curricular activities and visits to places of interest.

A well organised team of pastoral staff support teachers in providing very strong care, guidance and support to minimise pupils' obstacles to learning. A learning mentor, for example, works very effectively with pupils and their families to reduce absence. As a result, attendance is improving rapidly and the school receives local authority awards for meeting challenging targets. A very strong aspect of the school's care, guidance and support is the 'learning champions' initiative in which every pupil has a weekly opportunity to talk with an adult and receive useful guidance on how to improve their achievement. The school has strong partnerships with external support services to provide appropriate care for any pupils and their families who are in vulnerable circumstances.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leaders provide a very clear vision for every pupil to achieve the utmost. Responses to the inspection questionnaire demonstrate how all staff are pulling together in putting this vision into practice. A very effective system for monitoring pupils' progress is consistently used by staff to ensure that every pupil has suitably challenging targets and is helped to make good progress towards them. This system provides the basis for ambitious targets to raise standards at the end of Key Stage 2, and all staff are clear about how they contribute to achieving these targets. Leaders use innovative and effective methods to improve pupils' progress, for example, changing the time pupils move to their new classes in order to prevent the stalling of progress that has been observed at the beginning of the autumn term. The leadership team keep the quality of teaching and the curriculum under close review. They regularly analyse strengths and weaknesses and ensure that additional guidance or training is quickly provided where required.

The governing body has a clear understanding of the school's work. They are fully involved in evaluating strengths and weaknesses in pupils' progress and the quality of provision. Encouraged by the headteacher, they regularly ask probing questions to assure themselves that the school is doing its best for all pupils. They have systematic methods for gathering views from parents and pupils, and they respond to any concerns raised.

The school has very effective strategies for building a strong partnership with parents. This is based on their policy of not being 'hard to find' rather than assuming there is a problem with 'hard to reach' families. They use a wide range of communication methods to ensure that families of all backgrounds understand the work of the school and how welcome they are to participate. Weekly 'stay and play' sessions and 'mad science' courses for the whole family are just two examples of the many ways in which parents can gain insights into how to support their children's learning.

The school has a very strong commitment to working in partnership with other schools, often to share their effective practices more widely, but also to learn from good work elsewhere. Thornhill works in partnership with a Rotherham school from a different context to promote community cohesion. Joint activities are increasing pupils' understanding of the similarities and differences between cultures, and how to promote good relationships between people from different backgrounds. This collaborative work,

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supported by a strong focus on anti-racism in the curriculum, is the basis for Thornhill's very good contribution to community cohesion. Ensuring that every pupil has an equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background, is at the heart of all the school does. As a result, no group of pupils is underachieving. The required safeguarding checks are thorough and child protection arrangements are secure.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Most children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those whose first language is not English, make good progress towards their early learning goals. A well planned programme of home visits helps the children to settle in quickly when they start school and it launches a good partnership with parents.

Children's progress is particularly good in communication, language and literacy. This is supported by an effective approach to teaching letters and sounds which involves showing parents how they can help. Children's personal and social development is good because they are given well-planned opportunities to choose tasks and work independently. Adults help them improve their speaking and listening skills by talking to them about their activities. Occasionally, children are not given sufficient opportunity to take responsibility for such routines as preparing snacks and clearing up afterwards.

Staff have effective methods for recording information about children's achievements and using this in their future planning. The indoor and outdoor accommodation provides an attractive, safe environment in which children can develop trusting relationships with their peers and adults. Children learn much about different cultures and faiths and how

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people from different backgrounds can live happily together. They can explain why it is important to be kind. They learn to keep healthy through good hygiene and knowing how to choose nutritious food and drinks. They also have good opportunities for vigorous play in the fresh air.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of parents who completed the inspection questionnaire are fully supportive of the school. Ten per cent of parents added positive comments to the questionnaire about the very strong leadership team and the hardworking, approachable staff. A very small number felt that they did not receive enough information about their children's progress and that the school did not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. Evidence from the inspection indicates that parents receive detailed information about their children's progress at termly meetings with teachers and through a very clear annual written report. The inspection also found that teachers consistently use effective approaches to reducing misbehaviour.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thornhill Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 154 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 238 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	109	71	41	27	2	1	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	107	69	43	28	1	1	3	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	91	59	50	32	8	5	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	86	56	60	39	3	2	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	90	58	57	37	3	2	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	82	53	64	42	3	2	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	82	53	63	41	2	1	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	78	51	62	40	2	1	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	82	53	65	42	3	2	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	92	60	50	32	2	1	4	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	82	53	61	40	7	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	94	61	53	34	3	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	95	62	53	34	1	1	3	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



12 February 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thornhill Primary School, Rotherham, S61 1TD

Thank you very much for helping me with the inspection of your school when I recently visited with my inspector colleague. You gave us some valuable information in your questionnaires and when you spoke to us.

We have judged your school to be outstanding, which is exactly what many of you said in your questionnaires. Your school is outstanding because the staff help all of you to make good progress in your work and in becoming healthy, responsible people. You enjoy school because your lessons are very interesting, especially when you are doing your topics. You also enjoy all the trips you go on and the many after-school activities on offer. I'm not surprised that many of you said you love playtimes, because there are so many well-organised and exciting activities for you to choose from. You have played a big part in making your school outstanding because you work hard, you behave well and you respect each other.

Your headteacher, staff and governors want to make your school even better and we have discussed with them how this can be achieved. They have agreed with us to:

- give you more opportunity to learn things for yourself in lessons
- help the hardworking staff in the Nursery and Reception classes to provide an even better education for the youngest children in the school.
- try new ways of persuading all pupils not to stay away from school unless they really need to.

You can help the staff by really working hard to solve problems on your own in lessons, and by never staying away from school unless you really need to.

Yours sincerely,

John Rutherford

Her Majesty's Inspector

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