

Thomas Russell Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124150
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	340500
Inspection dates	16–17 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Derek Aitken

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	237
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Terry Wells
Headteacher	Mrs Shelley Sharpe
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Nine teachers were observed teaching nine lessons. Meetings were held with governors, staff and groups of pupils, and discussions and telephone calls were conducted with parents and carers. The inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at documents, including policies and procedures relating to the safeguarding of pupils, self-evaluation records and assessment data. The inspectors analysed 81 questionnaires from parents and carers, 99 from pupils and 13 from staff.

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

- pupils' attainment and progress in English
- how well middle-ability pupils make progress
- the impact of recent initiatives on improving teaching and learning and raising standards in English and mathematics.

Information about the school

The vast majority of pupils in this average-sized school are White British. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. In September 2009, the school joined a local authority programme, the Improving Schools Programme (ISP), to raise standards. The school holds the Activemark award and has Green Flag Eco-Schools status.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This school provides its pupils with a satisfactory education. The curriculum provides a wide range of enrichment activities, especially in sport, which contribute well to pupils' enjoyment of school.

Pupils' invariably join the school with above average prior attainment. While standards are regularly above average overall by the end of Year 6, partly due to pupils' good achievement in science, standards in writing and mathematics have varied from year to year. Pupils' achievement in writing was inadequate in 2009, and rates of progress in English and mathematics were inconsistent across the school due to some inadequate teaching and the lack of a whole school tracking system. The school implemented an action plan in September 2009 which has succeeded, within a relatively short period of time, in substantially reducing this underachievement and improving pupils' progress. This better progress is more evident in literacy, which was the first priority, than in mathematics. Achievement in writing is now satisfactory, but some weaknesses in pupils' progress in mathematics remain, especially in Years 3 and 4. While a small amount of inadequate teaching remains, most of the teaching is now good, particularly in Years 5 and 6.

The school has implemented a tracking system to record pupils' achievements, but leaders have not yet reached the stage of using it purposefully to plan the curriculum to fully meet the needs of all pupils. Not all teachers are making best use of assessment information for planning lessons, especially in mathematics, and for setting high expectations for pupils. Consequently, some lessons move at a slower pace and some variation in the rates of progress for pupils in different year groups remains.

Participation in the ISP has enabled leaders to acquire a more realistic overview of pupils' standards in English and mathematics. Some aspects of the termly evaluations of the progress that has been made on the programme lack rigour and governors are not as fully involved in the process as they might be. However, staff have worked well to implement the necessary changes and their increased accountability for pupils' progress is paying off. These successes demonstrate the school's satisfactory capacity for improvement.

The school has recently conducted surveys to measure the satisfaction of pupils, parents and carers with regard to the quality of provision. While these have been very positive, inspection evidence indicates some disquiet with regard to communication, procedures and the way in which the concerns of parents and carers are handled. Leaders acknowledge the need to address these issues.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate pupils' progress by:
 - making better use of assessment information to review the performance of pupils as they move up the year groups and to match the curriculum to individual needs
 - improving teachers' use of assessment in mathematics in Years 3 and 4 to enable them to plan lessons more effectively.
- Strengthen the quality of teaching so that it is good or better by:
 - ensuring that lessons regularly move at a brisk pace to provide greater challenge to all pupils
 - ensuring expectations for pupils' progress are consistently high.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring the ISP initiatives are robustly evaluated to show clear impact on pupils' progress and achievement and to identify sharply next steps
 - increasing opportunities for governors to be actively involved in monitoring pupils' performance on this programme.
- Improve the school's engagement with parents and carers by:
 - providing a wider range of opportunities for parents and carers to receive feedback on their children's progress and development
 - increasing the involvement of all groups of parents and carers to forge more positive relationships
 - ensuring that parents' and carers' concerns are always dealt with in a sensitive manner.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. While there is evidence in the school's assessment records of some underachievement in mathematics, lesson observations and work in pupils' books indicate that they generally learn satisfactorily over time in English and mathematics. All groups, including middle-ability pupils, progress at a similar rate. Any variations are related to the remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and in the deployment of teaching assistants. Pupils have good inference skills and display a secure understanding of the relationship between cause and effect, for example, when devising advertising literature. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve satisfactorily but sometimes they make good progress when teaching assistants have a sharp understanding of their needs and provide just the right amount of support and challenge to enable them to work independently. Pupils achieve well in science and

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reading, but progress in mathematics is more variable. Overall, standards in writing have risen as pupils are making good use of opportunities for self-assessment to improve their work. Pupils make slower progress in mathematics, as the curriculum is less fully developed in this subject and teachers' expectations for pupils are sometimes lower.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Behaviour is mostly good in lessons but this standard is not always maintained at play or in other areas where pupils socialise. Pupils have a good knowledge of safety-related issues, including safe use of the internet. They say, 'We enjoy swimming in the school pool where we get taught life-saving skills.' They take part enthusiastically in a wide range of other sporting activities, including cricket. They contribute very effectively to the school community as school councillors and carry out their responsibilities conscientiously as eco-warriors and as play leaders. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development has positive aspects but there are some gaps in their awareness of non-European cultures. Pupils' excellent attendance is not matched by the quality of their achievement, which means that they are set up only satisfactorily for the next stage in their learning and future lives.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

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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There are some good features common to all teaching. Teachers mostly have friendly relationships with pupils and information and communication technology and humour are used well to inject fun into lessons and promote positive attitudes to learning. When teaching is most successful pupils learn at a brisk pace and are challenged to do their best. For example, in an outstanding mathematics lesson pupils were enabled to carry out a range of calculations involving decimals accurately and transfer data quickly onto frequency tables. Teachers usually display good subject knowledge and plan well to meet the needs of all groups of pupils. The pace of learning in other lessons is slower when assessment is used less well to match work to the needs of all groups of pupils and when planning is focused more on activities rather than the skills pupils are expected to acquire. This reduces the time pupils have to practise and reinforce new concepts and review their learning. Teachers are making effective use of marking and pupils' targets in English to boost their progress but this good practice is not yet consistently established in mathematics.

The wide range of curricular enrichment, including specialist teaching in French and German, promotes pupils' enjoyment of school well. The new tracking procedures have provided leaders with most of the information they require to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of all learners but the resultant actions are still at an early stage. The progress of pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable, including new arrivals, is not yet closely tracked which reduces the school's capacity to deploy resources to maximum effect.

Pupils feel safe in school and are given good opportunities to take responsibility and develop healthy lifestyles. Improvements have been made to ensure that pupils settle easily into school on transfer from the feeder infant school and effective use is made of links with other agencies to support individual pupils. Attendance has risen in the last two years and procedures for monitoring it are good. Other aspects of pastoral provision are satisfactory.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership at all levels has improved through participation in the ISP. Middle leaders are making good use of opportunities afforded through this initiative to develop their professional expertise and to adopt a more pro-active approach to subject leadership. While this changed role is not yet embedded in the school's work, its impact is already

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reflected in improved rates of pupils' progress in literacy. The school has taken successful initial steps to enhance teamwork through involving teachers in regular discussions, for example, about pupils' progress and in exercises in joint planning. While senior leaders have a realistic view of key strengths and areas for development, some weaknesses remain in using data on pupils' progress to monitor and evaluate the progress being made on the ISP and to identify next steps. Governors provide the school with satisfactory support, but have not acquired sufficient familiarity with the detail of the ISP to enable them to hold leaders robustly to account. Safeguarding checks on adults meet requirements. The school has installed new gates and fencing to improve site security; other procedures for ensuring pupils' safety are satisfactory. The school promotes equal opportunities to only a satisfactory level as reflected in the variation in pupil outcomes. The promotion of community cohesion is also satisfactory as the school has yet to actively pursue its plans for developing national and global links.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents' and carers' responses to the questionnaire and their comments reflect an adequate level of support for the work of the school. While statistical analysis of their response reflects a more negative picture, written comments were more evenly balanced between praise and criticism. Most of the negative comments, expressed in the questionnaire and telephone calls, centred around inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, pupils' behaviour in social areas and outside school, and the way staff deal with parents' and carers' concerns. Inspection evidence partly endorses these views and

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this is reflected elsewhere in the report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thomas Russell Junior 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 81 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 237 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	43	53	32	40	4	5	2	2
The school keeps my child safe	43	53	36	44	2	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	31	38	39	48	10	12	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	32	41	51	10	12	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	26	32	42	52	10	12	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	29	36	42	52	6	7	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	40	44	54	4	5	0	0
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)	35	43	33	41	7	9	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	27	33	43	53	9	11	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	21	26	36	44	11	14	8	10
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	21	26	43	53	10	12	3	4
The school is led and managed effectively	30	37	36	44	9	11	4	5
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	34	42	35	43	10	12	1	1

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



18 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thomas Russell Junior School, Burton-on-Trent, DE13 8EU

I would like to thank you for the help you gave to the team when we inspected your school and to share with you what we found out.

Yours is a satisfactory school but there are some good things about it:

- you said you feel safe in school and you make good use of the chances to take exercise, pick up sporting tips, get a headstart in foreign languages and learn useful skills, such as life-saving
- you do a lot to help out in school, for example, as eco-warriors and play leaders
- the staff have worked well to improve your literacy skills and this is going well, as you have made good gains in your writing this year.

Overall, however, your progress is satisfactory. In particular, you could be making faster progress in mathematics. To help the staff in this task I have asked them to:

- make better use of what they know about your levels to keep a close eye on your progress as you move up the school
- make better use of assessment to plan lessons in mathematics in Years 3 and 4
- make sure all teaching is at least good so that all of you are stretched to do well and you all learn at a fast pace
- make sure that leaders, including governors, check closely that all the changes they put in place really help you with your learning.

We have also asked the staff to put in place a number of things to help them work better with your families. You can help by keeping up your super attendance and making sure you always behave well, especially outside the classroom.

Yours sincerely

Derek Aitken

Lead inspector

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