

Thongsley Fields Primary and Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133699
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	316199
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Roger Brown

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 on roll	
School	285
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Janine Bartrop
Headteacher	Miss Rachel Myer
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2003
School address	Buttsgrove Way Huntingdon Cambridgeshire PE29 1PE
Telephone number	01480 375321
Fax number	01480 375326

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average-sized primary school. It serves an area that is socially and economically disadvantaged. More than half the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well above average. The largest proportion of children are from White British backgrounds, but a growing number, almost a third, are from a wide range of different backgrounds. A fifth of the pupils are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language, and there are 13 different home languages spoken by pupils at the school. Around five per cent, are from a Traveller background. The number of pupils who join the school during term time, or who move on to other schools, is rising and now accounts for almost one third of the school population. The proportion of pupils who need extra support with their learning is very high, almost 60% in the school as a whole, and as high as 85% in some year groups. When they join the Foundation Stage, children's skills are often well below the expectations for their age.

The school has a Healthy Schools Award, a Basic Skills Mark and Activemark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school provides a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils. However, there are several notable and exceptional features about the quality of care and support it provides that make the personal development and well-being of the pupils outstanding. The school has a national profile for its work in providing a series of extended services that are carefully matched to the needs of the parents and their children. Working in very effective partnership with a range of organisations, it provides a Family Learning Centre and Children's Centre that give excellent levels of support. Pupils and their parents have a strong commitment to and a belief in the effectiveness of the school. 'I wouldn't want to put my daughter in any other school than Thongsley Fields,' wrote a parent, in a response that was typical of most of the views that were expressed.

Pupils behave well, showing respect for each other and the adults in the school. They have an excellent understanding of what they need to do to adopt a healthy lifestyle and how to stay safe. They really enjoy coming to school and relish every opportunity to contribute to the school's development. Attendance has improved markedly and is now good, thanks to the actions taken by the staff.

The standards attained are lower than those found nationally in all subjects. Nevertheless, there are clear signs that achievements in mathematics and science are improving. Pupil's progress in these subjects is now satisfactory. Standards in English remain stubbornly low. Staff do not focus sufficiently on assessing language acquisition skills and many pupils, particularly second language learners, struggle to achieve acceptable levels in speaking and listening. Throughout the school the development of writing is behind other areas of learning; very few pupils achieve standards that are in line with those expected.

The impact of teaching on pupil's learning is satisfactory. Staff have very good relationships with the pupils and this helps to engage them in lessons. The development of the school's pupil tracking system provides good information about the progress that pupils are making, but teachers are not yet fully capitalising on this knowledge to target their development and accelerate their progress.

Everyone, staff, governors, parents and pupils see the headteacher as crucial to the improvements that have taken place since the last inspection. Her vision for the school and the initiatives she has instigated are well supported by her assistants and the staff. The make up of the governors now reflects the community the school serves enabling them to give active, but critically supportive guidance to the work of the school. Consequently, with the focus now on academic achievement, the school has a good capacity to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children enjoy coming to school and enthusiastically take part in the rich variety of practical first-hand learning experiences that are available to them. The environment in the Nursery is particularly well organised, with well defined areas of interest designed to stimulate children to learn independently. By the end of the Reception year, their skills are still below the expectations for their age. Boys tend to achieve less well than girls. The impact of the teaching on the children's learning is usually good. The children make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development as well as creative and physical development. These help to

prepare them well for the move into the main school. However, some aspects of their academic skills, particularly the early stages of writing, are much less well developed, slowing their overall achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop and extend pupil's skills in speaking and listening.
- Raise standards in writing at all levels in the school.
- Develop teachers' skills in using assessment information to plan the next steps in pupil's learning.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards throughout the school are below those expected nationally. By the end of Year 2, pupils show satisfactory progress in reading and especially in mathematics; their achievements, although satisfactory, are held back by the limited progress in writing. By the end of Year 6, the trend for the last three years shows an improving picture in mathematics and science and although standards are still below those expected, the gap is narrowing and the pupil's achievements are now satisfactory. Writing has been and remains the weakest element at all stages. This is holding back the standards in English, which remain exceptionally low at the end of Year 6. The small but growing number of pupils who do not speak English as their first language, who join the school in the older year groups, complicates the picture. Pupils that find learning most difficult generally make satisfactory progress, though there is some evidence to show that those getting extra help make slightly better progress than their peers, and those with the most pressing needs do better than similar pupils nationally.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy coming to a school where spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Spirituality in assemblies and in relationships between adults and pupils has improved markedly since the last inspection. Pupils now have a strong understanding of a multicultural life. Excellent role models and high expectations of staff encourage substantial moral and social development in pupils. The Healthy Schools Award is due recognition of pupil's excellent grasp of healthy living. Pupils feel safe in school and are good at being heard through appropriate channels such as the school council. Eco Warriors, and Junior Wardens are two roles to which pupils are vigorously committed. Year 6 pupils, who did not attend the residential visit, responded enthusiastically to a job description as temporary teaching assistants with younger pupils. They thoughtfully applied themselves to the tasks they were given. This was a good taste of the world of work. Attendance is improving steadily; it is good in comparison to similar schools.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The impact of teaching on pupil's learning varies but is satisfactory overall. However, the proportion of good lessons is not yet high enough to ensure that all pupils make consistently good progress. Where teaching is good, the lessons are carefully planned and interesting. When this happens pupils behave well and do make good progress. In a few lessons, some pupils do not concentrate on their work. This slows the pace of learning and lowers achievement. In lessons where teachers talk for too long, they do not allow pupils enough time to practise skills, or challenge them sufficiently to develop their understanding. The marking in books does not always inform pupils exactly what they need to do to improve and teachers do not make best use of information from their on-going assessments of pupils' performance to plan tasks that challenge pupils across the ability range. Teaching assistants make a positive contribution, particularly towards the achievement of those pupils who find learning difficult.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school's long-term curriculum plan provides a secure structure for teachers' planning. This ensures continuity and progression in the development of children's skills in all Foundation subjects. There is a strong emphasis on personal, social and health education to promote positive attitudes and pupils are given many opportunities to work together. They enjoy a wide range of lunchtime and after school clubs. Visits and visitors are used particularly well to capture pupil's interest and support their understanding of the wider community. Pupils enjoy a range of visits, including a residential visit in Year 6, that all help to motivate their learning. The staff are beginning to exploit the opportunities to develop cross-curricular links but this work is not yet in all classes, restricting the development of writing across the subject areas. Information and communication technology (ICT) resources are limited, restricting pupil's access to ICT as an aid to learning, but plans are in place to expand the provision.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides a good overall quality of care, guidance and support. Pupil's safety and well-being are paramount and the school's caring attitude reflects fully in all aspects of its work. Arrangements for ensuring pupils' safety and welfare in school are good and fully meet government requirements. Pastoral care and personal support for pupils are outstanding and contribute to their often excellent levels of personal development and well-being. Staff spend a great deal of time getting to know parents. The appointment of a Family Worker to support those in most need, is very successful. Pupils report that initiatives such as the Playground Friends help make playtimes more enjoyable social occasions and say that rare incidents of inappropriate behaviour are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Staff provide a range of effective support programmes to build self-esteem and aid learning. Although pupil's academic progress is tracked and guidance is generally satisfactory, they are not always sure of their personal targets and many are unaware of what specific actions they need to take to improve their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Given the history of the school, the nature of its catchment and the needs of the pupils, the leadership have rightly concentrated on establishing a robust ethos where personal development and the well-being of the pupils is of paramount importance. Much of the leadership's time is invested in dealing with social issues and this aspect of their work is very successful. There is a strong recognition of what is going well in the school, but the leadership has been over-optimistic in the past in believing that the pressing academic needs of the pupils can be overcome without directing the same level of initiative, enterprise and energy that they have given to their first priority. The main focus of the leadership is now on developing the quality of pupil's 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?	3
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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
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?	2

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thongsley Fields Primary School, Huntingdon, PE29 1PE

Thank you for being so friendly when we visited your school. I would like to share with you what we found when we spent time in your lessons and talked with you and your teachers.

We enjoyed visiting your school and were very impressed with how polite and thoughtful you are. We were glad to see how well you get on together and delighted to hear how you enjoy coming to school. Do please keep up the good improvements in the way you are attending and getting to school on time.

We think your school is satisfactory in many ways, but we thought that your personal development and well-being is outstanding. Many of your parents told us this too. Well done! We could see that you are getting better at mathematics and science. However, we really would like to see your work in English improve as well, particularly your writing, but also your skills in speaking and listening.

When we watched your lessons and looked at your work, we could see that your teachers and teaching assistants work really hard to help you to learn. Even so, we have asked your teachers to work out how they can use the information they get about what you do well and what you still need to know, to plan with each one of you what you need to do to improve your learning.

Thank you once again for your warm welcome, and thank you for the strawberries from the school garden, they were delicious. We hope that you have left some for the Year 6 who were away on the residential visit!

All the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Roger Brown Lead inspector