

Thorpe Acre Infant School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	119958
Local authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	379921
Inspection dates	7–8 February 2012
Lead inspector	Michael Miller

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	111
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anne Johnson
Headteacher	Jane Fines
Date of previous school inspection	30 October 2008
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Introduction

Inspection team

Michael Miller

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. During the inspection, nine lessons were observed over nearly four and a half hours. Five teachers, and their teaching assistants, were seen working with the pupils. Two lesson observations were held jointly with the headteacher. In addition, the inspector spent an hour hearing individual children read. Discussions were held with the headteacher, class teachers, office staff and representatives of the governing body. Many informal opportunities were taken to talk with the children as they worked and played. The inspector observed the school's work and evaluated a wide range of school documents including: development plans; policies; self-evaluation reports; monitoring files; safeguarding and curriculum materials; and information for parents and carers. Governing body records were examined, including the headteacher's reports to the governing body, and other reviews of the school's performance. In planning the inspection, the inspector took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View). The inspector spoke with a number of parents and carers at the start of the school day, and analysed the 30 responses to the parents' and carers' questionnaires returned during the inspection.

Information about the school

This is a smaller-than-average-sized school. The large majority of the children are of White British heritage. A small minority of the children come from other ethnic heritage groups, mainly Asian or Asian British, with a few from Black or Black British, mixed or other heritage groups. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is average; a number of these attend the school only in the years when their parents and carers undertake courses at the local university. Mobility in the area is also high due to local council re-housing. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The percentage of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is average. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs is well below average; needs are mainly specific and moderate learning difficulties, although a number of pupils also have behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. The school has renewed recently its Healthy Schools award.

A privately run pre-school playgroup, the Thorpe Acre Pre-School Playgroup, operates from a mobile classroom leased from the school. This setting was reported separately by Ofsted in October 2008.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. Pupils make good progress and achieve well. Good leadership, management and teamwork, on the part of all staff and governors, are ensuring good and sustained improvement.
- Staff in the Reception classes are ambitious for the children to gain the best start to their education. This underpins well the school's ethos and its approach.
- Teaching across the school is consistently good. Teachers have high expectations of the pupils and challenge them effectively day-by-day. Teachers and teaching assistants alike are good at asking questions which help pupils to think and explain their ideas.
- Comprehensive records are maintained on the pupils' progress. These are used well to support their personal development and academic learning.
- Work on letters and sounds (phonics work) is taught systematically each day, and rooted in an approach where the development of pupils' speaking, listening and reading skills are given high priority. However, pupils' handwriting skills are weaker and currently a focus for school improvement.
- Attainment in numeracy is slightly higher than in literacy. Nevertheless, the school is keen to improve further pupils' standards in mathematics by increasing opportunities for them to practise their number and calculation skills.
- Behaviour is good because the pupils enjoy both their work and their play. They feel safe because the school places a high priority on their welfare.
- Provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, both through what is taught as well as their wider personal development.
- The school works hard to encourage parents and carers to support their children's learning through their day-to-day parenting, and activities with their children at home. The response of some families has not been as active as the school would wish to help it enhance further the pupils' progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' attainment in writing and numeracy in all year groups by:
 - improving children's coordination and control in using tools for mark

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- making and writing in the Reception year
 - ensuring the school's new scheme for improving pupils' handwriting is implemented fully across the school
 - increasing opportunities, across all subjects, for all pupils to practise their skills in manipulating number and making calculations.
- Extending the schools' work in engaging with parents, carers and families to help them grow in confidence and develop the expertise to support their children's learning at home.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

All parents and carers responding to the questionnaire agree their children make good progress. This is because the school meets pupils' individual needs, and teaches and looks after them well. This reflects the inspection findings. As one family wrote, 'We are very impressed by the school's support of the children's educational strengths as well as their developmental needs.' The starting points for the large majority of children, on entry to the Reception classes, are well below those expected for their age. They are often low regarding the children's personal, social and emotional development as well as their communication, language and literacy skills. There is a strong focus on these areas in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Developing speaking and listening, and helping children understand the needs and feelings of others, as well as their own, have a high priority. Staff maintain a constant dialogue with the children not only to assess their individual needs and progress, but also to ensure they maintain an interest and enjoyment in learning. Consequently, by the time children transfer to Year 1 they have made good progress and their attainment has improved to below average. Good progress is maintained throughout Key Stage 1; by the end of Year 2 pupils have achieved well and attainment has improved further to average.

The accurate tracking and analysis of pupils' attainment, learning and development enable the school to monitor effectively the progress of all groups of pupils. This ensures that whether pupils attend the school throughout all three years, or for a shorter time as part of the transient population in the area, their individual needs are met well. Almost all pupils leave having made good progress given their starting points. Skilled support teaching ensures good challenge for those pupils with disabilities or special educational needs; this enables them to make a valued contribution in lessons. Discussions with pupils and families who speak English as an additional language show the good progress they make gives them confidence; this enables them to work successfully alongside others in their classes.

All groups of pupils are helped by the school's systematic approach for teaching phonics. Pupils say they really enjoy these sessions at the start of each day. The confidence they gain in their understanding of how letters make sounds, and how

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sounds blend into words, enables them to become confident, average readers by the end of Year 2. Pupils are not afraid to tackle new words or unfamiliar text in any context throughout the school day. However, their reading record books indicate that many do not benefit from regular, additional opportunities to practise their reading at home. While the school has focused well on phonics and reading, the development of handwriting skills has been a weakness. A new, whole school approach has been introduced, but has still to have full impact. Nevertheless, a methodical approach has been established. Starting in the Reception classes, a more specific focus on skills in using tools is helping children master the use of writing equipment. Pupils throughout the school take a pride in showing their writing and the ways they can communicate ideas through this. This was seen from more simple, phonetic words in Reception Year, recording children's recent experiences in the snow, to more complex sentences about machines in the Year 2 topic. Pupils also talk about their enjoyment of numeracy. However, the school's evaluation of pupils' progress shows they are weaker in their number and calculation skills than in other areas of mathematics. School improvement planning is now focused well on developing additional opportunities to promote the use of number, and for pupils to practise calculations across all subject areas.

Quality of teaching

All parents and carers responding to the questionnaire say teaching is good; this reflects the inspection findings. They appreciate the ways the school develops their children's communication, literacy and numeracy skills. The good expertise in teaching phonics, in particular, is equally as effective in Reception Year as in Year 2. Teaching and support staff alike are similarly well skilled in their use of questions, not only to challenge the pupils but also to check the depth of their understanding. Marking is regular, helpful and supports well the teachers' oral feedback to the pupils; this helps pupils know how to improve. The school has been developing its use of homework to enhance pupils' progress. This is one of the ways through which the school is encouraging family involvement and support of their children's learning; so far, the impact of this has been mixed.

The ways teaching promotes fun and enjoyment in learning, and leads to good achievement, was exemplified in a Year 1 mathematics lesson on measure and proportion. The effective use of real fruit juice to mix a 'fruit punch' was both a practical and challenging exercise in helping pupils develop an appreciation of millilitres and litres as measures. There was good promotion of speaking and listening as pupils were encouraged to discuss the different types of measure. The teaching also built well on the pupils' curiosity when they wondered why the juice seemed to 'twist' as it poured from a container. This reflects the school's good promotion of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the ways they are encouraged to interact and reflect on their observations and learning. Social development and healthy lifestyles were promoted well through the planning of a lunchtime party to drink the results of their work. This broad based approach is typical of lessons in all year groups; it results from good curriculum planning and the way teaching builds successfully on the pupils' needs and interests.

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Behaviour and safety of pupils

'The school makes behavioural expectations clear to all the children, and the majority are well-behaved', commented one parent. This was characteristic of a number of written comments and confirmed by the inspection findings. There are some pupils who find it difficult to manage their behaviour consistently well throughout the day. Discussions with the pupils show they understand they are 'naughty' at times, but say their teachers help them all to understand how to behave well. School records show behaviour management rarely needs to go beyond a simple verbal warning; anything which could be interpreted as bullying is rare. Writing on their questionnaires, a few parents and carers expressed some concern about behaviour and/or bullying. In balance, others wrote that when their children mentioned 'bad' behaviour it was also said that their teachers dealt with matters quickly and their children were never upset by it. This was confirmed in discussions with the pupils. Their good understanding as to how to keep each other safe was seen, in practice, in the care they took in the snow and icy conditions and this reflects parents' and carers' views about their children's safety. Pupils act safely because proper courtesy and consideration for others are embedded in the approach of all adults. Behaviour is also good because the pupils enjoy their time at school and appreciate that their teachers have much to offer them. Attendance is regular and appears average only because of normal childhood illnesses or seasonal 'epidemics'.

Leadership and management

Typical of the parental comments were, 'The school is strongly led and moving in a positive direction', and 'The staff and headteacher are very approachable regarding any issues, and feedback is very good.' They agree that the arrangements for safeguarding their pupils have a suitably high priority, and the effectiveness of these was confirmed during the inspection. This includes the welfare of pupils whose family circumstances may make them more vulnerable. Leadership is effective in the ways it works to tackle any discrimination its pupils and families may experience. This ensures all have a fair chance to succeed. Its way of working, whether promoting learning or the pupils' personal and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, has enabled the pupils to achieve well at each stage and across all year groups. The headteacher, other teachers and governors have established good levels of trust and credibility with the pupils' families. The school is looking to build on this and involve families even more actively in their children's learning.

The school's successful track record of steady and consolidated improvement since its last inspection supports well its good capacity for further improvement. Good governance ensures the governing body plays an active, teamwork role in both monitoring and development planning. Self-evaluation is thoughtful and has led to good quality development planning. This is reflected in the school's good and continuously improving curriculum, which meets pupils' needs well. The effective monitoring of teaching and learning, and the commitment of staff to ensure their own training keeps them up-to-date, have secured consistently good teaching and

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the pupils' equally good achievement. Staff are reflective, do not rest on their laurels, and ensure the school is progressive in its thinking and approach.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



9 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thorpe Acre Infant School, Loughborough, LE11 4SQ

You attend a good school. Thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed my visit very much, talking with you and seeing all the things you do each day. You asked me a lot of questions, and I hope I was able to answer them as well as you did when you answered mine. It was good to see how the adults at your school take good care of you, keep you safe and help you to do as well as you can in both your work and play.

These are some of the other things I found that are good about your school.

- It is a friendly place.
- You have good teachers, who help you learn something new each day.
- You enjoy school because there is always something to interest you.
- You get a good start to your education in the Reception classes.
- You make good progress and achieve well during your time at the school.
- The skills you learn help to prepare you well for junior school.
- You behave well and know how to keep each other safe while at school.
- Your headteacher, other teachers and governors lead your school well.

I have asked your headteacher, and the other teachers, to do some extra things to help all of you make even better progress. You have all been working hard on improving your handwriting, but many of you need extra help so you can become really good at this. Your teachers will also give you extra opportunities to practise your number work in all your subjects. Finally, I am asking your teachers to encourage more of your parents and carers to help you with your learning at home.

In one of your assemblies, you showed me how well you understand your school aim of, 'Reaching high, learning and growing together'. Taking turns, you had good fun in showing how well you can 'settle quickly', 'be independent' and 'resist distractions'. Each time you succeeded, one of you kicked a football into a goal in celebration. Please keep on scoring lots of goals, and I wish you all well for your future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Miller
Lead inspector

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