

Thropton Village First School

Thropton, Morpeth, Northumberland NE65 7JD

Inspection dates

26–27 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders, staff and governors are united in their desire to improve the school and ensure that it is at the heart of the community. They have tackled weaknesses head on and have an accurate picture of what still needs to be done.
- Parents and carers have full confidence in the school and are integral to its future development. They appreciate that their views are valued.
- An effective partnership with the nearby middle school has improved leadership and teaching.
- Teaching is improving and is now good. Strong teamwork means that expertise is shared. Leaders ensure that individuals receive well-targeted support and training.
- Effective teaching ensures that pupils now make good progress in their reading, writing and mathematics and other subjects such as science and French.
- Staff have an in-depth knowledge of each child so that disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive the right support to overcome anything which might hamper their good progress.
- Early years provision is good. Children settle quickly and make good gains as a result of well-planned, enjoyable opportunities to learn.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils want to learn and respond keenly to what their teachers are asking of them. Lunchtimes and playtimes are relaxed and sociable. The playground is well resourced so pupils are occupied purposefully.
- Pupils are keen to take responsibility in class and around school. They help each other and their teachers willingly. Pupils who are new to the school settle quickly and make friends.
- The curriculum has been developed carefully in response to the school's mission statement. Pupils experience a rich range of visits and visitors to ensure that they understand their own community and the wider world.
- Pupils' progress in geography and history is not as strong as in other subjects because they are not challenged enough to develop skills in these subjects.
- Pupils, and the most able in particular, are sometimes given tasks in a range of subjects that restricts how much they can write and this prevents them being fully challenged.
- In early years, some resources do not encourage exploration and investigation.
- Subject leaders have begun to check on the quality of the curriculum and teaching. This is at an early stage and has yet to further improve pupils' learning.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve teaching by:
 - providing challenging activities which will develop pupils' skills in geography and history
 - ensuring that all pupils, and the most able in particular, are challenged to write at length in a range of subjects so that more reach a higher standard
 - providing a wider range of resources and activities in early years that encourages children to explore and investigate.
- Continue to develop the role of subject leaders so that they improve the quality of the curriculum and pupils' learning further.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the last inspection, the whole staff team and governors have united in a drive to improve the school. Mindful of the school's importance in a rural village community they have ensured that parents continue to be fully involved in new developments. The development of the school's mission statement and invitations to monthly multicultural lunches are examples of this.
- The partnership forged with Dr Thomlinson Middle School has increased the ability of leaders to drive improvement at a more rapid pace. Some staff, including the executive headteacher, work across both schools, using their experience and expertise to good effect. This ensures that the school runs smoothly and that there is sufficient capacity to improve the quality of teaching further.
- Leaders have reorganised the structure of classes and initiated a bespoke programme of training and support to improve teaching. Rigorous checking by senior leaders ensures that dips in performance are addressed quickly. Poor performance is not tolerated. Staff are keen to improve and welcome the appropriate support they are given. They are aware of what they need to do to improve further.
- Regular, detailed checks are made on pupils' performance. All staff know each pupil extremely well and they take prompt action for those in danger of falling behind. Leaders use funding for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to provide individually tailored support to overcome any difficulties they may experience.
- The assistant headteacher and special educational needs coordinator make a strong contribution to school improvement, through their work to develop the curriculum and improve teaching.
- The primary school physical education and sport premium is used well to increase the range of sporting opportunities available to pupils. The proportion of pupils who access after-school clubs has increased rapidly so that the majority of pupils now attend.
- The curriculum has been designed to fulfil the school's mission and ensure that pupils understand their own community and the wider world. The many visits and visitors bring learning alive and make it memorable. This is particularly successful in enhancing pupils' cultural development.
- Subject leaders are at an early stage of their career. The well-planned programme of support to develop their leadership skills is just beginning. They have started to evaluate the curriculum and teaching in their areas of responsibility but have not yet made a difference to pupils' learning.

Governance of the school

- Governance is effective. Governors have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and have implemented their review recommendations thoroughly.

- To improve their effectiveness, they check their performance regularly and ensure that they undertake appropriate training.
- Governors' regular monitoring and probing questioning ensure that they hold leaders rigorously to account. They have a clear understanding of the school's performance.
- Governors have a very good knowledge of the community and of the challenges facing small, rural schools, which has enabled them to make use of the partnership with the middle school. They are now considering carefully how to ensure the future success of the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and governors believe that safeguarding is of the highest priority. They ensure that complacency is avoided through commissioning an external review of the school's procedures.
- Staff are confident that they know how to deal with any concerns and are trained regularly so they have good knowledge of how to keep children safe.
- Throughout the school and in the playground there are reminders to staff and to parents that children's safeguarding is of paramount importance.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching has improved since the last inspection. Class responsibilities have been reorganised to ensure that all recently qualified teachers benefit from the assistant headteacher's effective support and guidance. Complementing this support is a well-thought-out programme of bespoke training for each individual. Teaching is now good and improving and consequently pupils are achieving well.
- Relationships between adults and pupils are strong. Adults know pupils very well and they are typically given work which matches their capabilities. For example, pupils read books at an appropriate stage of difficulty. Questioning is challenging, such as when older pupils are required to use their inference and deduction skills so they understand a text more fully.
- Adults generally have good subject knowledge so teaching is accurate. The teaching of phonics is effective because adults have a precise understanding of what they are teaching. They use this knowledge well to identify pupils' misunderstandings, which are then promptly addressed. Pupils are alerted to aspects of learning that may prove more difficult so they concentrate more carefully.
- Teachers' good knowledge of French helps pupils acquire a good vocabulary in that subject. Teachers' knowledge of science is also strong and ensures that appropriately challenging tasks are demanded of pupils.
- Questioning is used well to check pupils' understanding, to deepen their thinking and to adjust lessons when pupils are struggling. Learning builds in clear logical steps because teachers know what pupils need to do next to progress well.

- The school's feedback policy is followed well by teachers. For example, pupils are given time to respond to the feedback and this contributes to their learning and progress.
- Teachers' assessments are accurate. They have worked with colleagues in the middle school and the local authority to ensure that they make accurate judgements to build pupils' learning at an appropriate stage.
- Teaching assistants provide good support. They work closely with teachers to share their knowledge of pupils and provide guidance and encouragement to support them when they find work difficult.
- The most able pupils are challenged appropriately to think more deeply in their reading and mathematics. In writing, all pupils, including the most able, are not given sufficient opportunities to write at length, and apply the writing skills they have been taught, in subjects other than English.
- Pupils are not given challenging tasks to develop skills in history and geography well enough. The tasks they are given are more focused on enhancing their knowledge without close enough consideration of the specific skills needed in the subject.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to encourage pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Parents praise the warm, family atmosphere in school. This is particularly apparent at lunchtime, when pupils and staff enjoy a relaxed and sociable lunch together.
- Pupils and parents are confident that the school is a safe place to be. Relationships are warm and trusting. Adults know each pupil very well. Pupils say that they have an adult to turn to if they are worried.
- Pupils enjoy taking responsibility. Older pupils are proud to be house captains, or head boy or head girl. Younger pupils have jobs in their class.
- Pupils who are new to the school say that they settle quickly and make friends because a classmate is allocated to look after them.
- Pupils have a good understanding overall of how to stay safe such as when using the road or avoiding a fire in the home. They understand the dangers of using the internet and what they should do to avoid those dangers. However, some aspects of keeping safe are not so secure among some children, such as how they should use medicines safely.
- Staff work well with a range of agencies and with parents to support pupils' social and emotional well-being.
- The breakfast club provides a calm, nutritious start to the day for those who use it.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.

- School records confirm pupils' views that sanctions are rarely used because of unacceptable behaviour. Any incidents that do occur are followed up and addressed promptly.
- Learning proceeds well without disruption. Pupils take pride in their work. Presentation in their books has improved, and when asked by a teacher, they are keen to improve.
- Behaviour at lunchtimes and playtimes is equally good. A good range of equipment for pupils to play on keeps them purposefully occupied.
- Although not all pupils have a clear understanding of what bullying is, records confirm that it is extremely rare. Pupils know that it is unacceptable to make fun of anyone because of the way they look or speak.
- Attendance is above average and pupils arrive at school on time and ready to learn. When pupils are absent, there are good procedures in place to follow this up quickly.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The progress pupils make has accelerated and is now good as a result of the actions taken by senior leaders to improve the quality of teaching.
- In 2017, nearly all pupils left the school at the end of Year 4 at the expected or higher than expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. Consequently, pupils were well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- The good progress made in key stage 1 ensured that nearly all pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2.
- Strong teaching of phonics supported all pupils to meet the required standard in 2017. Those who did not meet the standard the previous year made very good gains.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are provided with careful, tailored support. They progress well so that over time, they make good gains and are closer to the expected standard for their age.
- Leaders use funding for disadvantaged pupils to target appropriate support which ensures that they progress well and consequently their achievement is the same as that of other pupils.
- The proportion of pupils reaching higher standards is increasing and the most able pupils now make good progress in reading and mathematics. In writing, they do not always progress to their full capability because there are missed opportunities to develop and apply their writing skills.
- In subjects beyond English and mathematics, progress is more variable. In science, French and physical education, good gains are made. In science, for example, pupils are asked to draw conclusions based on their findings. However, progress in history and geography is hampered because skills in these subjects are not taught effectively.

Early years provision

Good

- Provision in early years has improved since the previous inspection because of effective leadership and good support from the local authority. The early years leader has a good grasp of strengths and areas for development and has ensured that staff receive appropriate training to develop their skills. Recent training, for example, has supported them to develop children's communication and thinking skills more effectively.
- Adults pay close attention to each child's needs and give them care, reassurance and confidence. Nursery children settle quickly into school life, participating in lunchtimes and mixing with older children. They are sensitively supported to join in and play with other children.
- Children cooperate well together. They play and share ideas about how to build models for example. They behave well and follow rules and routines, listening to adults.
- Assessment of children's capabilities and stage of development has improved, aided by very good partnerships with parents. As a result, adults can plan carefully what children need to do next to extend their understanding.
- The good provision enabled all children to achieve a good level of development in 2017 so that they were ready for the demands of the curriculum in Year 1. Some children whose starting points were typical for their age reached higher standards in their reading, writing and mathematics.
- Typically, good use is made of the resources available to stretch children to think more deeply through investigating and exploring. For example, a session in the forest school developed children's mathematical understanding and vocabulary. However, this is not always the case and some resources, particularly those indoors, offer children limited opportunities to explore and investigate or to extend and challenge their thinking.

School details

Unique reference number	122229
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10036544

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

Type of school	First
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	3 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	37
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Bolam
Headteacher	Liam Murtagh
Telephone number	01669 620297
Website	www.thropton.northumberland.sch.uk
Email address	admin@thropton.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	8–9 December 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported through the pupil premium is below the national average.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is below average.
- In early years, children of Nursery age attend for five mornings a week. In the Reception Year, children attend full time.

- There are two classes. In the first class are children in early years and Year 1. In the second class are pupils from Years 2 to 4.
- The executive headteacher is also the headteacher of Dr Thomlinson Middle School in Rothbury. A number of other staff also work across both schools.
- Since the previous inspection, nearly all staff and half of the governing body are new to the school.
- The school provides a breakfast club.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed a range of teaching and learning in parts of lessons in each class. Two of the observations were undertaken jointly with the executive headteacher.
- The inspector spoke with pupils about learning and school life, both individually and in groups. The five responses to the pupil questionnaire were also considered.
- The inspector listened to pupils reading. She reviewed pupils' work in lessons and analysed samples of work in their books.
- Discussions were held with members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and members of staff as well as pupils who attend breakfast club.
- The inspector looked at the school's review of its own performance, its improvement plan, a number of key school policies and minutes of governing body meetings. She considered a range of documentation in relation to child protection, safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- Informal discussions were held with parents. The 21 responses to the online questionnaire for parents, Parent View, were considered.
- There were five questionnaires completed by staff and considered by the inspector.

Inspection team

Susan Waugh, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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