

Thakeham First School

The Street, Thakeham], Pulborough, RH20 3EP

Inspection dates 23–24 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Senior leaders, including governors, have succeeded in maintaining the school’s overall good effectiveness since its previous inspection, despite several staff changes.
- The quality of teaching is good throughout the school and enables pupils to learn successfully and achieve well.
- Children enjoy a good start to their education so they quickly become settled and confident learners.
- Pupils build their basic skills particularly well, including speaking, listening, reading, writing and numeracy.
- The interim headteacher has strengthened existing routines and made refinements such as identifying ways to further improve teaching.
- Pupils relate well to each other and to visitors. They behave well around the school and within lessons. They say they feel very safe, and identify that adults ‘listen to us carefully’ if we have a problem.
- Parents and carers are very positive about the school’s effectiveness and place within the community, highlighting the positive family atmosphere and the way the interim headteacher has quickly developed links with them.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Pupils in Years 1 to 5 have too few opportunities to use and apply their numeracy skills in mathematical real-life based investigations.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage do not always have enough resources to extend their physical learning and development.
- In some lessons, pupils have limited time to complete their written or mathematical work or to use information and communication technology (ICT) to help improve their learning.
- Pupils’ understanding of others’ lifestyles different to their own is not sufficiently well developed.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited seven lessons or part lessons. He observed two lessons with the interim headteacher, and activities related to the teaching of pupils with special educational needs or who are disabled were also observed.
- Meetings were held with the staff and the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor, and the inspector had a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority. He looked at documents, including the school plans for improvement, safeguarding information, assessment records, attendance information and the school's checks and information on pupils' progress. Discussions were held with a number of staff responsible for different aspects of the school.
- Two representative groups of pupils met with the inspector. He also heard pupils read in Year 2 and Year 5, and observed playtimes, lunchtime arrangements and two assemblies. He looked at the past work of pupils in Years 2 and 5.
- Account was taken of the responses in nine questionnaires completed by members of staff and 33 responses to the Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View).

Inspection team

Kevin Hodge, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average first school serving pupils aged between four and 10 years old from the local rural community. There have been several staff changes since the previous inspection. An interim headteacher of an outstanding school, who is also a National Leader in Education, has lead the school part time since September, while governors investigate the options for a permanent appointment. She has been appointed to lead the school for up to a year if needed.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. There are three mixed-age classes: a Reception and Year 1 class, a Years 2 and 3 class and a Years 4 and 5 class.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is below average. This is additional funding provided to schools for children in the care of the local authority, those children known to be eligible for free school meals and those from service families.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported by school action is below average as is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. In reality, the numbers of pupils involved are very small.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement to the highest levels through the school by:
 - giving pupils, particularly those in Years 1 to 5, more opportunities to use their number and problem-solving skills in real-life investigative activities
 - ensuring all pupils get down to work quickly, always have enough time to complete their tasks and make any required improvements
 - increasing the opportunities for pupils to use their ICT skills regularly in everyday activities
 - enhancing resources in the Early Years Foundation Stage to extend children's physical learning and development.
- Widen opportunities to promote pupils' understanding of lifestyles different from their own.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils achieve well in English and mathematics. Their speaking and listening skills are key strengths. Standards have been maintained since the previous inspection and by the time they leave the school, pupils reach levels higher than those expected for their age. Pupils' achievement is not yet outstanding, as not all reach the highest levels of knowledge or understanding in their day-to-day work, particularly in practical number work.
- Children join the school in Reception with levels of skill broadly typical for their age, but an increasing proportion have weaker mathematical skills when they start. They settle confidently and learn their basic letter sounds quickly and make up ground quickly in their number knowledge.
- Children enjoy learning and work enthusiastically as they explore the differences between solid and flat shapes through touching unseen objects in a 'feely bag'. Although children use small wheeled bicycles in the playground, the range of resources to extend their physical skills is relatively limited. As a result, this is a weaker aspect of their learning and development.
- The strong focus on teaching pupils about letter sounds is proving effective this year and a higher proportion achieved above average levels in the national phonics screening check than last year. Pupils enjoy reading as books are at the right level of challenge. Most read a good range of books, but some do not readily recall the authors. They reach better-than-expected standards in reading by the time they leave the school.
- Numeracy skills are taught frequently and pupils' calculation skills, such as when working out the perimeter of irregular shapes, are speedily applied and accurate. However, their knowledge of numbers is not applied often enough in investigative activities or connected to real-life situations. This hinders aspects of their progress in mathematics.
- As a result of the improvements made since the last inspection, pupils now enjoy writing creatively and at length. Pupils in Years 4 and 5 worked enthusiastically to improve sentences connected with their work on *Macbeth*, while pupils in Years 2 and 3 liked making up imaginative endings to a poem based on their space topic. Despite some good learning, in both of these lessons, pupils did not have sufficient time to develop and record their ideas, and complete their work.
- Pupils use their well-developed speaking skills to explain to visitors how they enjoy using the school playing field for sports, what they like about the school, and how much they are looking forward to competing against other schools in team sports.
- The very small number of pupils who benefit from pupil premium funding achieve well, and gaps between the levels they and others achieve in English and mathematics have been eliminated. Often these pupils exceed the levels reached by their classmates or others nationally.
- Pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs achieve well, as extra adult support, combined with well-planned activities, enables them to keep pace with others in the class. Pupils' previous work indicates no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls and this was borne out in lessons and current work.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The quality of teaching is good and enables pupils' good achievement in English and mathematics despite a number of changes of staff since the previous inspection. Pupils are particularly praiseworthy of their teachers, often noting their good sense of humour and the way they typically make lessons interesting as stimulating their positive attitudes and success as learners.
- The small number of pupils with special educational needs or who are disabled achieve well because of the skilful one-to-one support they receive and activities which are pitched well for their level of ability.

- Teachers carefully weave reminders into lessons about how people should treat others and work together, helping to develop pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. Occasionally, opportunities are missed to extend pupils' understanding about the lifestyle of others from different backgrounds to their own.
- Children in the Reception and Year 1 class experience activities that capture their interest and there is usually a good combination between the activities children choose for themselves and those led by the teacher. Children particularly enjoy reading simple three letter words and singing out the sounds of the combinations of letters chosen by the teacher. From time to time, these children, along with others in the school, do not always have enough opportunities to shape their own learning by having more choices in the activities they follow, such as using ICT resources to enhance their learning.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about their targets and they say that their new system of 'three stars and wish' helps them to improve their work. Work is marked regularly by teachers and pupils often respond with comments which indicate that the teacher's advice has been used to good effect.
- Teachers make appropriate use of the audio-visual whiteboards to capture pupils' interest. Teachers' explanations are clear, but a bit too long at times, according to pupils, who say they would like to get down to activities more quickly so that they can complete their work.
- Although comparatively small in number, those pupils with special educational needs or who are disabled are catered for well and the family ethos in the school is beneficial in that pupils readily make allowances for others and include them fully in activities. Teaching assistants provide regular and well-targeted support, both within the class and occasionally in adjacent space, to help these pupils achieve as well as others in the class.
- The school recognises the importance of extending pupils' physical education (PE) through regular links with other local schools and within day-to-day lessons and pupils are enthusiastic in telling visitors about their playing field used for team sports.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The good levels of pupils' behaviour have been maintained since the last inspection. Pupils are mature and courteous to visitors and to each other. Individuals all help to create a family ethos, aided by the harmonious relationships, and pupils are proud of their school.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school, appreciate that they can express any concerns and are well aware of who to turn to if there are problems. Pupils are aware of different forms of bullying, particularly those related to cyber bullying.
- Pupils behave well in lessons, listening to their teachers carefully so they know what to do. On occasions, pupils are sometimes happy just to do the work given, rather than think up different ideas or ways of boosting their own learning further. The school council has worked with the interim headteacher to review expectations to see if they can encourage pupils' behaviour to be even better.
- Many parents, carers and staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire confirmed their view that pupils' behaviour is a positive aspect of the school. New parents and carers who spoke to the inspector said that they were very impressed by pupils' behaviour.
- Despite having comparatively few 'official' responsibilities, pupils are keen to befriend others, particularly disabled children, and this reflects their caring nature. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of their local surroundings, but are not as confident or knowledgeable about potential differences of those from contrasting backgrounds. A recent African drumming workshop however, along with studies of different faiths, has helped deepen their understanding.
- Pupils like the range of clubs staff provide, covering sports, dance, music, gardening, pottery and board games. These extend their cultural and artistic awareness along with the knowledge of the benefits of exercise and healthy lifestyles.

The leadership and management are good

- Governors have succeeded in navigating recent changes to the leadership of the school, new teaching appointments, reduced funding and changes in membership of the governing body so that the school's good effectiveness has been maintained since the previous inspection.
- The interim headteacher brings a significant depth of knowledge and expertise in managing the day-to-day running of the school, while sensitively introducing changes to help maintain strengths and improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. Parents and carers spoken to by the inspector were appreciative of the increased involvement already offered to them this term.
- The quality of teaching is checked effectively and staff are particularly positive about the support they receive in helping them to improve their teaching still further. All those who responded to the Ofsted staff questionnaire said they were proud to be part of the school. Staff are clear that their responsibilities and pay progression are linked to pupils' good and improving achievement.
- Pupils benefit from well-planned experiences that promote their interests and successful learning in nearly all subjects. The recent additional funding to promote pupils' physical development skills is being allocated sensibly. For example, it has been allocated to buy in the expertise of a sports coach next term to enhance staff confidence in teaching the subject and to provide more opportunities for pupils to compete against pupils from other rural schools.
- The school makes sure that the very few pupils with special educational needs or in receipt of additional government funding have the support they need. This is often through one-to-one support or additional resources to assist those who are disabled. The recently appointed special educational needs coordinator has sharpened assessment and review procedures, resulting in some pupils identified as no longer needing support and reflecting the success of the school in meeting their needs.
- The local authority has been instrumental in ensuring that the day-to-day leadership of the school has remained secure by helping to arrange the appointment of the interim headteacher and is actively involved in supporting governors in securing a permanent appointment.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have successfully managed recent changes within the school to good effect. The securing of a long-term interim headteacher of a local outstanding school, while they consider different options for a permanent appointment, has ensured the school's continuing good effectiveness. New governors are already booked for training, while former governors have benefited from a high number of courses. The Chair of the Governing Body and existing experienced governors provide good role models for newer governors, particularly making sure that they are aware of their responsibility for ensuring that teachers' salary progression is merited. They have a good insight in how pupils eligible for the pupil premium progress, along with knowing how effectively additional funding for PE is used. Governors appreciate their involvement in the clear action plan devised by the interim headteacher. This has included enhancing routines for them to visit the school to gauge and report upon the progress of initiatives. Governors are very conscientious in ensuring that equal opportunities exist for all pupils and that discrimination of any sort is not tolerated. They ensure that their statutory duties, such as site security and staff vetting checks, do more than simply meet safeguarding requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	125856
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	412589

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–10
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	62
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Matt Starling
Headteacher	Janet Sharp (Interim)
Date of previous school inspection	18–19 May 2010
Telephone number	01798 812133
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