

Appleton Thorn Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111138
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	337626
Inspection dates	15–16 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Clare Henderson

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	186
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Warren
Headteacher	Mrs Jackie Stillings
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 13 lessons taught by nine different teachers. The inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body, staff, the school improvement partner, parents and carers and pupils, observed the school's work and looked at documents relating to safeguarding, pupils' attainment and progress, the curriculum, the school's development plan and the way in which the school evaluates its own performance. The views of parents and carers, through 108 returned inspection questionnaires, and those of staff and pupils were analysed.

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

- Whether all pupils make at least good progress, and are, as the school says, 'independent learners' who 'understand the process of learning, thinking and decision making'.
- Whether the quality of teaching and the use made of assessment information is outstanding.
- The quality of the curriculum, care, guidance and support and the impact they have on pupils' overall achievement.
- Whether leaders and managers at all levels show, as the school believes, 'clear vision and a strong sense of shared purpose' and outstanding capacity for further improvement.

Information about the school

The school is similar in size to others of its type. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. A few are from minority ethnic groups. The school has gained the Activemark, Artsmark Silver, ICT Mark, Financial Management Standards in Schools, National PSHE Accreditation, International Schools Award (intermediate status) and Healthy School status.

Privately run before- and after-school provision is situated within the school building. This provision was subject to a separate inspection and a report about its quality can be found on the Ofsted website.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding school. The driving force in its success is excellent leadership. A description of this that sums up typical views of parents and carers who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire is, 'dynamic and reflective leaders with a real sense of vision for the school's long and mid-term future'. This outstanding leadership at all levels provides clear direction and promotes an extremely strong desire from all staff that each pupil will succeed.

Children begin the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills which are broadly in-line with those expected at this age. They make good progress in the Reception class because of the good quality of provision provided, particularly in the outdoor environment. However, because planning, assessment and observation systems are not always focused closely on identifying the next steps needed to fully extend children's learning, progress is good, rather than outstanding. The outstanding quality of teaching in Years 1 to 6 ensures that rates of progress accelerate rapidly and all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities consistently make outstanding progress. As a result, pupils' attainment in English and mathematics by the time they leave in Year 6 is high.

Pupils are excellent ambassadors for the school. They are articulate, enthusiastic and independent learners. Their exemplary behaviour and tangible enjoyment of school, which are reflected in their high attendance, confirm this view. They show an excellent understanding of what is needed to lead healthy, safe and ecologically sensitive lifestyles.

Outstanding care, support and guidance and excellent partnerships within the community contribute very effectively to pupils' outstanding achievement and social and emotional development. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The highly innovative curriculum is enriched with excellent features. These include many high class opportunities for pupils to extend their research and information and communication technology (ICT) skills very effectively across all subjects. It also provides a wide range of interesting after-school clubs, which provides many opportunities for pupils to excel in art, sport and music.

The excellent track record of continued improvement since the last inspection, effectively illustrates leaders' and the governing body's outstanding ambition and drive. The school is aware of its strengths and areas for development and has shown it takes effective action to ensure improvement. This commitment illustrates very well the outstanding capacity that the school has to improve further.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate to outstanding children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, by refining planning, assessment and observation systems to ensure that they consistently identify the next steps needed to extend children's learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

'Don't tell me the sky is the limit when there are footprints on the moon'. This motto, lived out by all pupils, is one of the contributory factors in their outstanding achievement and enjoyment of school. In all lessons, pupils are well-motivated and display considerable enthusiasm and a strong desire to learn. Highly practical and challenging activities, thought-provoking questions and the exciting use of resources, ensure that learning is accelerated at a rapid pace. Such high quality learning ensures that pupils are very well prepared when they leave for the next stage in their learning.

Pupils say they feel extremely safe in school and that they could go to any adult for help if they had a problem. They are provided excellent opportunities, with adult guidance, to learn for instance, how to carry out risk assessments. This provides them with skills which will aid their continued safety and well-being. Pupils willingly take on a very wide range of responsibilities. They feel adults listen to them and respond positively to their ideas. For instance, as school councillors, play leaders or members of the Healthy School Task Group, they engage in decision making and are especially proud of their part in improving healthy eating options and the outdoor environment. A walking bus, initiated by pupils' and their parents' and carers' concern for road safety, is highly effective in developing pupils' understanding of the benefits of staying healthy and safe. Pupils' involvement within the local and wider communities is outstanding. These links are interwoven effectively into the life of the school. This is evident as they celebrate the village tradition of Bawming of the Thorn; when they entered and won a garden design competition; or in meeting with pupils from cultures and religions which are different to their own. The concern that pupils show for those less fortunate than themselves is impressive. The Haiti Market event, in which pupils made and sold produce for victims of the earthquake, enabled them to develop enterprise skills very effectively while helping others.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

All teaching observed was good or better, with the large majority in Years 1 to 6 outstanding. Pupils are provided with real-life contexts for their learning. This was evident in a Year 6 lesson in which pupils designed a garden, using and applying their mathematical skills to help to achieve the task. Teachers' on-going review and assessment of pupils' work ensure that pupils have a clear idea of what needs to be done next in order to maintain improvement. Tasks are matched precisely to pupils' ages, interests and varying abilities. Gifted and more-able pupils are challenged to extend their skills to the maximum.

The school is at the forefront of innovative curriculum design. It has enthusiastically grasped the opportunity to develop a curriculum in which pupils' literacy, numeracy, and ICT skills are linked imaginatively with practical investigations, historical and geographical studies. Residential visits, learning French and German, and an excellent range of after-school activities and opportunities to excel in music, sport and the arts, add purpose to pupils' learning and experiences, while also extending opportunities for them to show initiative.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are expertly supported and early identification of their needs ensures that necessary support is provided, through a wide range of school-based programmes and/or external specialist support. Transition

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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arrangements are carefully planned through excellent partnerships formed with local high schools and networking with local schools.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and deputy headteacher lead the school exceptionally well. All staff, including subject leaders, the site manager and administrative personnel, are highly committed to enhancing their talents and skills for the benefit of pupils. Close attention is paid to ensure that provision fully meets the needs of all. Pupils' progress is checked thoroughly and provision astutely adjusted where needed. Harassment of any form is not tolerated and the ethos established in the school is one of promoting full equality for all. For these reasons, the school's capacity to improve is judged outstanding. Links with parents and carers are excellent. The school grasps every opportunity, through frequent information meetings for parents and carers and the use of the highly effective website, to gauge and respond to their views. Governance is outstanding. Members of the governing body and, particularly the Chair of the Governing Body, whilst being supportive of all the school does, continually challenge school development, never settling for less than the best. Exemplary safeguarding procedures, which are central to all the school does, contribute very effectively to pupils feeling extremely safe and enjoying school immensely. The quality of community cohesion is good overall. The focus the school gives, through excellent partnerships within the local community to develop pupils' understanding and tolerance of differences, is noteworthy. Pupils' experiences and knowledge of cultural and religious differences at national and global levels are good rather than outstanding as the impact they have on pupils' attitudes have not yet been fully measured.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children get off to a good start to their learning and development in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They have good opportunities, both indoors and outdoors, to learn through an exciting range of activities they have chosen for themselves and those that they are directed to by adults. This develops their imaginative and creative skills well. The children follow routines well and, as they begin to invent their own games, are rapidly developing into independent, confident learners. Activities focus well on enriching children's knowledge and understanding of the world. For instance, through studying about India, children learn to appreciate other cultures and traditions. Good relationships with parents and carers underpin the school's good induction and care procedures. Staff know children well and make sure learning is fun whilst meeting welfare requirements very effectively. As a result, children make good progress and finish the Reception Year with skills which are above those expected in all areas of learning. Leadership is good, with all adults working together effectively. However, planning, assessment and observation systems do not consistently identify the next steps needed to extend children's learning.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation	2

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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Stage	
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Views of parents and carers

A much higher than average percentage of parents and carers completed the questionnaire. Of these, the vast majority were highly positive in their responses. They are particularly pleased with how happy their children are in school, that the school keeps their children safe and promotes healthy lifestyles, and that teaching and leadership and management are excellent. A few feel that the school does not meet their child's particular needs, take account of their views, inform them of how well children are progressing in their learning, deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour nor prepares children well enough for the future. Inspectors followed these issues up and found that the needs of all pupils are managed extremely well. The learning needs of each child are considered and reported to parents and carers regularly. Behaviour observed during the inspection was exemplary, and pupils leave the school extremely well-equipped for the next stage of their lives.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Appleton Thorn Primary 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 107 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 186 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	77	72	29	27	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	96	90	10	9	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	62	58	43	40	2	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	63	59	40	37	3	3	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	66	62	38	36	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	65	61	38	36	2	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	77	72	30	28	0	0	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)	65	61	35	33	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	64	60	38	36	3	3	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	59	55	38	36	2	2	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	60	56	36	34	5	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	84	79	23	21	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	78	73	28	26	1	1	0	0

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 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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 pupils' 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.



17 November 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Appleton Thorn Primary School, Warrington, WA4 4RW

The inspection team very much enjoyed visiting your school and we were extremely impressed by how each one of you is eager to do as well as you can. We thoroughly enjoyed talking to some of you and seeing how much you enjoy your lessons, playtime and lunchtime. I particularly enjoyed seeing the work you have contributed to the school website. We judged your school to be outstanding. These are some of the things the school does very well.

- Adults take excellent care of you and you told us that you feel extremely safe.
- You have an excellent knowledge of how to lead a healthy life.
- You are taught exceedingly well and receive excellent care, support and guidance.
- You make outstanding progress in lessons and your behaviour is excellent. We were very impressed with your responsible attitude and the way you consider each other's feelings often before your own.
- You thoroughly enjoy the many interesting activities arranged for you, such as your annual Bawming of the Thorn' celebration.
- Your parents and carers are very pleased with your progress in school.

Your headteacher and all the school's leaders are determined to continue to improve your school so that you all continue to do as well as you possibly can. We have asked your teachers to do one thing more. That is, to ensure the work planned for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helps them to achieve the very best they can in their learning and development.

You can help by continuing to work as hard as you possibly can. This will help you continue to achieve well and reach even higher standards.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Clare Henderson
Lead inspector

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