

Name: Thames View Infants
Headteacher: Paul Jordan
Location: Barking
Ofsted rating: Outstanding
Size: 400+ pupils
Extra info: Proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is well above the national average



Paul Jordan, Headteacher

“We’re vibrant, passionate and hands-on”

Twice ‘outstanding’ Thames View Infants is a colourful and creative Academy where barriers to both learning and social cohesion are being overcome

Passion is an overused word these days, but when Paul Jordan, headteacher at Thames View Infants (TVI), deploys it, it doesn’t ring hollow. “This is my calling,” he says of his position. “It’s a vocation. The school is my family, my life.”

It is partly about commitment – Paul’s passion for East London, for infant education, and for the school he has led for 10 years, through two ‘outstanding’ inspections, has kept him in post when more financially lucrative opportunities have come calling and, more importantly, helped to propel TVI into the top 5% of infant schools nationally for attainment – in circumstances that are never less than challenging. But it is also about enthusiasm and excitement. It is fair to say that it takes passion for one’s

cause to get up and dance in assembly on one of the hottest afternoons of the year (which 3 to 7 witnessed), or to put on a Helen Shapiro-based cabaret act at Christmas and make it work across countless cultural divides (which, sadly, we didn’t). At TVI, Paul tells us, academic outcomes and a vibrant – a *passionate* – approach to headship and teaching in general are inextricably linked.

What comes across loud and clear over the course of our conversation, and as the interview pauses briefly once, twice, three times for some of the challenges of leading a school to be confronted, is that Paul genuinely cares for his charges and the work he and his team are doing to effect positive change in the wider community...



1 A change of culture

“Don’t do your first headship on the View,’ someone said. The director of education came down to see me within the first couple of weeks, and asked, ‘Are they any different, the families on this estate?’ I said, ‘No.’”

In many ways taking over at TVI was a natural move for Paul Jordan. Having completed his degree in the North East, he had returned to his roots and risen steadily through the ranks at different schools – from class teacher to history coordinator, to science lead, then Key Stage 1 lead in a school in special measures. “After that I became a deputy in an infant school just down the road within the borough,” he says. “That’s where I found out about the depth of provision you need to be ‘outstanding’. When the position came up here in 2007, I knew it was the right school for me.”

Nevertheless, TVI represented something of a jump into the deep end. As ever, the statistics only tell part of the story, but they are important context: at the time of the school’s 2014 Ofsted report, which followed its conversion to Academy status in 2012, close to three-quarters of children spoke English as an additional language (today, 43 different languages are spoken by children at home), and numbers accessing pupil premium funding, and those with a special educational need or disability, were well above national averages. Paul himself notes that the school is situated “in the most deprived ward in the tenth most deprived authority nationally”, but plays down the impact of EAL: “English as an additional language isn’t really a thing for me – we’ve got multicultural staff, a lovely ethnic blend, and you overcome it. It doesn’t present as an issue with most children at all.”

Alongside the challenges arising from its location, back in 2007, the school’s teaching required improvement too, and that meant a change of culture. “It was ‘satisfactory’ when we took it over,” Paul explains. “The culture I wanted to instil was much more vibrant, much more learning focused, with a signature pedagogy and an emphasis on developing empowered children, using talk for learning and giving them a voice. Because the curriculum wasn’t, in my view, deep or far-reaching enough, I rewrote all the lesson plans in Key Stage 1. My deputy [deputy headteacher, Claire Smith] did the same for early years, too. The night before planning, I was up till about three or four, in that first year, coming to school on Red Bull, then teaching to model the expectation...”

The change of culture Paul ushered in was built upon ‘responsive leadership’, which in practice sees him guiding the



“This school represents equality, and that’s rubbed off on the neighbouring environment”

school from the front. He admits to being in and out of classrooms on a regular basis; he mentors his NQTs, and teaches when time allows. “It’s the only way,” he says. “As a head, you have to inspire your teachers to teach; you have to make sure the planning’s completely fine – and it’s the best way to check the standards.”

It was only 18 months after Paul’s arrival that TVI received its first ‘outstanding’ judgement. “I was fortunate because a whole lot of people came with me on that journey,” he reflects. “It was a very empowering process.”

2 Raising attainment

While children often arrive at TVI at below expected levels of attainment, they don’t lag behind for long – in fact, their progress is inspiring, with many leaving for KS2 at well above the national average for attainment (or as Paul puts it, “more able than children in Richmond upon Thames, the most affluent, highest-attaining local authority average in the country”). So what is the secret?

“I’m trying not to say ‘high expectations’,” Paul says, “because



“I’m proud we’re ‘outstanding’”

For Paul making a success of TVI, and maintaining and building upon its achievements to date, means a huge amount. “I pride myself on being head at an ‘outstanding’ school – and should that not be the case one day, I don’t know what I would do, really,” he says. He speaks positively about his experience of inspection, and is forthright in his view that when it comes to educational settings, being Ofsted ‘good’ isn’t really good enough.

Just as TVI is looking outwards to its community, so too is it offering its expertise to other schools, often without charge. Paul is a National Leader of Education, and the plan is for TVI to become a Teaching School, working in partnership with the University of East London. Paul is also keen to set up a Multi Academy Trust, and is actively seeking an infant school requiring improvement in TVI’s vicinity that would be keen to embrace his approach to education.



I don't think people necessarily get what 'high expectation' is – but really believing that these children can do it, that they can achieve a greater depth, that they can get their early learning goals is really important. There's a can-do atmosphere here."

There is also a proactive mindset. Paul points to practice in the nursery and Reception classrooms, where child-initiated provision is supplemented by short, sharp, highly focused whole-class teaching sessions that provide the leg up many pupils need. "They take 15 minutes," he explains. "They're planned, they have talk for learning, lots of songs and rhymes. They're often story-led. There's a huge emphasis on everyone being involved."

As you would expect, speech and language is a focus at TVI. Support groups and a dedicated speech and language therapist help address areas of concern, and Paul again points to the influence of talk as a foundation for learning: "How can you get children to read sentences let alone write sentences, if you're not encouraging them to speak in sentences first? That starts down in nursery."

Identifying strategies to hurdle the barriers posed by special educational needs has become important, too. "Increasingly we're taking children who should be taught in some form of additional resource provision – at least one child per class in early years," Paul says. "We've had to be flexible to deal with this. So we have our own nurture group, which previously was a behavioural-based resource provision

but this year is special needs-led. You need to have sufficient staff to work in this way, and we spend a high percentage of our budget each year on employing them – the ratio is at least one to 10 in every class, and some classes have one to seven. Of course, all this means we have to have great financial management, too."

3 Reaching out

Alongside the academic support at TVI there is a significant pastoral component to its teachers' role. "Increasingly this job is also becoming about parenting, and you need people who are absolutely tuned into that," Paul says. To help open channels with home, he operates an any-time, open-door policy for mums and dads, with the promise that they will be listened to by somebody who knows their child well and wants to help.

This all feeds into an ambition Paul returns to on several occasions – to challenge "traditional dispositions to learning". These, he explains, vary from individual to individual, but can also be rooted in cultural background, and relate to a host of issues – from approaches to parenting and discipline, to attachment, attendance and a family's past relationships with educational settings. "Some families have had bad experiences, whether it's the parents themselves as children, or their children in another school. Unpicking that, and getting trust going in how we do things, takes thought. It's something we do very carefully," he says.

In an effort to begin this process as early as possible, Paul and

his team are keen to reach out into the community in a novel way: "We want to do up a double-decker bus, make it look really funky and try to get the zeroes to twos for drop-ins, coffee mornings, play sessions, so we can say 'this is what we're about' and catch parents with those good parenting messages," he tells us. "We just need to find the forty grand to do it."

Putting TVI at the heart of a community that in some respects feels like a village, isolated as it is by surrounding industry and infrastructure, and bringing its diverse elements together is another focus: "Community cohesion is something we've always felt very strongly about, and what we're really good at is getting British values right," Paul says. The school works hard to cultivate that sometimes elusive sense of British identity by going to town with St George's Day – "we dress up, do maypole dancing" – combining Harvest with Eid, holding an Easter parade through local streets and marking festivals such as Diwali, amongst others. "I think this school represents equality, and that's rubbed off on the neighbouring environment," Paul sums their efforts up. **TP**

JUST ADD EXCITEMENT

What does a vibrant infant school look like? At TVI, children's uniforms come in a kaleidoscope of colours; a small dog, Pear, shares the headteacher's office (a three-legged cat, Humphrey, also calls the school home); everybody is on first name terms. Paul and his team are determined to create an atmosphere in which children can relax, and enjoy and succeed in their learning.

And dancing in assembly? That's all part of the plan too. "Dancing unites cultures, it makes children happy, it reminds teachers that it's about being fun," Paul tells us. "And what better than the headteacher leading dancing in assembly, or during Christmas concerts, to bring everyone together? Again, it challenges those traditional dispositions to learning."

A vibrant approach is a useful tool for involving families in school life, too. Open days, sports and cooking classes are regular fixtures, while a lively annual school election project runs for two weeks, culminating in poll winners taking office for a day. The latter is also about increasing engagement with the real-world democratic process, another of TVI's efforts to empower its pupils and their families. Children form parties, create manifestos, canvass for support and produce a Newsnight-style podcast, before casting their votes – hopefully encouraging their mums and dads to do the same when they get their chance. "There's a culture of parents being disengaged, of not voting and not understanding the process," Paul says, "but with this, we can get them excited."