

Thomas Gray Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134785
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	381741
Inspection dates	8–9 March 2012
Lead inspector	Stephen Rowland

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	221
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Phil Gretton
Headteacher	Rachael Rimmer
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

Stephen Rowland
Julie Webster

Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed nine teachers teaching eleven lessons. In addition, inspectors visited short phonics (the sounds that letters make) sessions and listened to children read. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, members of the governing body and school staff. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents including the school development plan, records of pupils' attainment and progress, and minutes of meetings of the governing body. During the inspection, 64 parents' and carers' questionnaires were analysed together with others completed by pupils and staff.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. Almost all pupils are of a White British background and very few are at an early stage of speaking English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above the national average. The proportion of those who receive external support, including those with a statement of special educational needs is also above the national average. The school meets the government's floor standard.

The school has a nurture base known as the Phoenix Unit which provides for pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. The school runs its own breakfast club. The school holds a number of awards including the Investors in Pupils Award, the International Schools Award and the Basic Skills Quality Mark. Since the previous inspection a new headteacher has been appointed.

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	1
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- This is a good school. It has improved rapidly in recent years and has a number of strengths. Pupils work and play together in a calm and secure environment and their behaviour is outstanding. The school is not outstanding overall because there are some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching which prevent teaching being outstanding overall.
- Achievement is good. Children make a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and make good progress, particularly in communication skills. Progress in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is good and attainment at the end of Year 6 is in line with the national average. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make progress which is in line with their peers.
- Teaching is good. There are examples of outstanding practice. Most lessons are lively and engaging and the pace of learning is brisk. Lessons are planned in a thorough and systematic way to meet the needs of all groups of pupils. However, there are some inconsistencies relating to opportunities for independent learning and the quality of feedback to help pupils to improve further.
- Behaviour is typically outstanding. Pupils’ positive attitudes to learning contribute significantly to the school’s success. Bullying is rare and is dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils have a strong awareness of unsafe situations and how to avoid them. Attendance has improved rapidly in recent years and is now just above the average for primary schools.
- The headteacher’s leadership is focused and determined. Senior staff and the governing body share a common ambition for the school. The performance of pupils is tracked carefully and actions are taken to tackle any variations in outcomes. Teaching is monitored thoroughly and best practice shared. The curriculum is good and provides a solid grounding in basic skills as well as a broad and stimulating range of experiences for pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
 - giving pupils frequent opportunities to develop their independent learning skills
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to explain their thinking in depth both orally and in writing
 - ensuring that the guidance in marking helps pupils to know how to improve their work and extend their learning further and that they have time to respond to the advice given.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

A very large majority of parents and carers are pleased with the progress their children make in school and agree that they develop skills in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. Inspectors confirm that achievement is good. Pupils enjoy lively and engaging lessons and respond well. They make good progress when they are challenged to take on demanding tasks and to find solutions to problems. In a highly effective design and technology lesson, for example, pupils worked in pairs to find the best way to make a paper structure stronger. They were able to discuss their thinking in depth and to experiment to refine their ideas. There are regular phonics and guided reading sessions so that progress in reading and spelling is good. This was confirmed by the school's own detailed records of pupils' broadly average attainment in reading at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are supported well and make good progress as do pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals. The school's Phoenix Unit provides outstanding support for pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable so that this group makes outstanding progress.

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills which are generally well below those typically expected for their age. They make good progress, particularly with language and social skills, and enter Year 1 as confident learners. Under the leadership of the current early years coordinator there is convincing evidence that an increasing number of children will meet or exceed expected attainment by the end of the Reception Year.

Pupils' progress in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is good. Attainment has been broadly average over the last three years. There was a strong improvement in attainment in Key Stage 1 in 2011. The school has focused on a systematic approach to the development of basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics and this has brought about a steady trend of improvement. The school has very thorough records of progress and plans work to meet the needs of all groups of pupils. Records show that a large majority of pupils are now on track to meet the targets set for them.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is good and there are examples of outstanding practice. This is so in all key stages with examples of very effective practice throughout the school. All parents and carers who

responded to the questionnaire agreed that children are taught well in the school and inspectors agree.

The school uses assessment information thoroughly to set pupils into groups for literacy and mathematics lessons and to set up effective interventions to support particular groups. The focus on boys' language skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1 has had a positive impact on attainment and progress. The best lessons are lively and engaging and provide opportunities for pupils to explore and to discuss their ideas. In these lessons progress is brisk and pupils develop the skills needed to manage their own learning. Teaching assistants provide valuable support. In an effective science lesson, for example, Year 1 pupils were given opportunities to discuss and compare different tastes and smells. Supported by their teacher and teaching assistant, pupils were encouraged to talk about the practical task which asked them to identify and describe a variety of substances and how they smelt and tasted. This activity helped the pupils to develop their language skills and enabled them to work independently. The school's key leaders are working hard to share the best practice and to make good teaching even better.

Occasionally teachers do not give enough time for pupils to work independently so that they can become over-reliant on the teacher's direction. Although pupils are encouraged to discuss their learning through the use of 'talking partners' they do not have sufficient opportunities to explore their ideas in depth, orally or in writing, or to fully explain why they have chosen a particular solution to a problem. Marking is usually supportive and encouraging but does not always make it sufficiently clear to pupils what has to be done to improve their work. Pupils are not always given enough time to respond to the teacher's comments.

The curriculum ensures that basic language and numeracy skills are developed systematically and effectively. The developing 'Learning Challenge' curriculum offers an increasingly wide range of activities which engages and stimulates pupils. Teaching contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils work well together and accept the importance of respecting all members of the class. The very best teaching helps to foster a love of learning and a fascination with the world's diversity.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

All parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire agreed that there is a good standard of behaviour in the school and that lessons are not disrupted by bad behaviour. Inspectors observed outstanding behaviour both during lessons and around the school. This is because the school has a clear and consistent approach to behaviour management which pupils actively support. They demonstrate great pride in their school community and treat others with respect and consideration. School records show that behaviour is characteristically outstanding over time with no exclusions recorded over recent years. Outstanding support is provided in the Phoenix Unit for pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and who may find it more difficult to settle in school. Pupils agree that behaviour is characteristically very good and that any inappropriate behaviour is dealt with swiftly and effectively.

Attendance has risen swiftly over recent years and is now just above the national average for primary schools. This suggests that a large majority of parents and carers value what the school has to offer and that pupils enjoy coming to school.

Almost all parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire said that the school deals quickly and effectively with all forms of bullying. Pupils are strongly aware of different forms of bullying and are active in confronting them and preventing them from occurring. Pupils say that they can talk to staff about any concerns they may have and that they are confident that they will be listened to and that action will be taken to support them. Many parents and carers commented on the caring ethos of the school. One such comment was, 'I have found great comfort and support from teachers at the school. All concerns have been dealt with quickly and efficiently.' Pupils say that they feel safe in school and this is confirmed by parents and carers. All those who replied to the questionnaire agreed that their child was safe in school. Pupils learn how to avoid unsafe situations.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides strong and determined leadership. She is ably supported by an experienced and committed senior leadership team. They have identified the key issues facing the school and have tackled them in a very focused and concerted way. This has led to clear improvements in achievement and teaching. The school is well supported by the governing body which knows the school well and does not shrink from asking challenging questions when required. Timely training and support has allowed the staff to share good practice and to become more confident in leading and managing aspects of the school's work. The school's thorough tracking system has meant that any concern is quickly identified and action taken to tackle it. Teaching and learning is thoroughly monitored through a programme of lesson observations and work scrutiny. Self-evaluation is honest and rigorous and planning for improvement is detailed and comprehensive. Leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, are actively involved in this process. There is clear evidence of the positive impact of the school's strategies and this shows that there is a good capacity for sustained improvement.

Safeguarding arrangements which ensure the safety and security of pupils are comprehensive. The school works closely with parents and carers and a very large majority of them agree that their concerns are dealt with effectively. A very small minority of parents and carers did not agree that this was so. Inspectors examined this issue and found that the school is aware of any concerns raised and takes action to tackle them. Discrimination has no place at Thomas Gray. Promotion of equality is good because any gaps in performance are quickly identified and acted upon. Previous underperformance in boys' reading and writing has been successfully addressed.

The curriculum provides a strong grounding in the basic skills of English and mathematics and offers a broad range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities. These include artistic, sporting and cultural events, such as the recent visit to France. The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils respect each other and understand right and wrong. In many lessons and activities they acquire a 'sense of the spiritual' in the world around them. One indication of this is the excellent display work around the school.

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.
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.



12 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thomas Gray Primary School, Bootle, L20 4LX

Thank you for making us so welcome during our recent visit to Thomas Gray. We were particularly grateful to those of you who agreed to meet us during your lunch break. We were also grateful to those of you who completed the questionnaire. Your comments were very helpful.

Yours is a good school. It has a number of strengths.

- You make good progress in English and mathematics and standards in these subjects are rising.
- Your behaviour is outstanding. Your excellent attitude in school helps the school to be successful.
- Your school is very safe. You know how to act in a safe way and staff take good care of you.
- You learn about lots of varied and interesting things in your lessons.
- The headteacher, staff and governing body are determined to make the school even better.

We have asked the school to do some things to make it even better.

- Make sure you have plenty of chances to work independently and to organise your own learning.
- Give you regular opportunities to explain and to talk and to write in detail about how you have solved problems or planned pieces of work.
- Make sure that you always know how to improve your work and have time to respond to the feedback which your teachers give you.

You are right to be proud of your school. Please help it by always trying your best.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Rowland
Lead inspector

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