

# Thorns Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	103787
<b>Local Authority</b>	Dudley
<b>Inspection number</b>	355459
<b>Inspection dates</b>	17–18 May 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Linda Rockey HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	187
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Graham Cadwallader
<b>Headteacher</b>	David Priestley
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	27 January 2010
<b>School address</b>	Thorns Road Quarry Bank, Brierley Hill DY5 2JY
<b>Telephone number</b>	01384 818285
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. Inspectors visited an assembly and eleven lessons observing seven teachers. Inspectors made several visits to the Early Years Foundation Stage to observe provision. They scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including school data collected on pupils' attainment and progress, procedures for keeping pupils safe and the school improvement plan. Inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body's strategic committee, the senior leadership team, staff, parents and carers, representatives from Thorns College and groups of pupils. In addition, inspectors analysed 88 questionnaires completed by parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How has attainment been raised and pupil progress improved?
- Has the quality and consistency of teaching and assessment improved across the school?
- What strategies are being used to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence?
- How effectively are leaders at all levels contributing to school improvement?

## Information about the school

Thorns Primary School is smaller than the average sized primary school. It admits pupils from the locality, although an increasing number come from outside the local area. The majority of children start school from the on-site pre-school group, although a number also come from different settings within the locality. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. A few pupils speak English as an additional language. There has been an increase in the number of minority ethnic pupils in the recent past. This can be seen particularly in Key Stage 1 classes. At the last inspection, Thorns was given a notice to improve because it required significant improvement. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is under half the national average. Since the last inspection there have been a number of staff changes. A new deputy headteacher was appointed in January 2010 and a new phase leader (Years 1-3) in September 2010. One teacher is currently on maternity leave and the deputy headteacher is covering a vacancy in Year 1. The Early Years Foundation Stage is catered for in one Reception class. The pre-school facility on the school site is managed by a private provider. This has been inspected separately and the report is available on the Ofsted website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

**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?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

## Main findings

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. Since the last inspection, there has been a sharp focus on improving outcomes for pupils.

This is an improving school. Leaders have worked systematically to tackle underperformance in Key Stage 1 and below average attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. Standards are slowly rising and school data show the gap between the national average and expected school results is reducing. As a result of actions taken to address weaknesses in teaching and learning seen at the last inspection, progress is now good for all groups of pupils. However, the senior leadership team is clear that more has to be done to ensure more-able pupils reach higher levels across the school.

Pupils in Key Stage 1 have made good progress in literacy, especially with their knowledge, use and understanding of sounds and letters. In Key Stage 2, pupils' writing has improved. However, progress in mathematics has not improved so rapidly and the staff know that to improve mathematics there must be a more consistent approach across the school, particularly in teacher assessment and marking. The different performance of girls and boys in mathematics and English has been successfully addressed. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported by a team of committed and well-trained teaching assistants. They are also making good progress through well-planned intervention.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is a strength of the school. Children start in Reception with skills and knowledge that are below, and for some well below, those typical for their age. They make good progress across all areas of learning because provision is exciting and relevant to their needs. Adults have a good understanding of how children learn and develop and plan a good range of activities to support all areas of development. This exciting and engaging curriculum in the Reception class provides a good model for the rest of the school. The recent narrow focus on reading, writing and mathematics in order to raise attainment across the school has led to a rather limited approach to learning. Senior leaders recognise the importance of developing a more cross-curricular approach to learning while not losing the rigour required to keep raising attainment and maintaining rapid progress.

The school has a family atmosphere and pupils, staff, parents and carers are all valued and cared for. One parent wrote to the inspectors: 'All staff members are friendly, approachable and understanding and the school therefore has an overwhelmingly welcoming feel. I am very proud to say that my son attends Thorns Primary School'.

A strong leadership team, effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's performance together with the governing body's strategic committee have all contributed

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to the drive for raising attainment. These factors, together with accurate school self-evaluation, means the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By January 2012, further raise attainment in mathematics through improved use of teacher assessment and marking to inform pupil progress.
  - Develop the curriculum to ensure a broad range of cross-curricular, creative and exciting learning opportunities through a highly coherent and relevant programme of study.
  - Increase the challenge for more-able pupils, so that they achieve the higher levels of attainment, by setting tasks with the potential to stretch their capabilities.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**3**

Pupils say they enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their improved rate of attendance which is now average. Pupils' academic achievement is satisfactory overall. In 2010, attainment at the end of Year 6 fell significantly. However, progress seen in pupils' books and in lessons during this inspection demonstrates the good progress identified in the school tracking data. This is a result of improved teaching and learning. Pupils enjoy their lessons, work hard and apply themselves well.

Pupils' eagerness to learn was observed in a Year 4 literacy lesson about the use of persuasive language to market a product. Pupils used their prior knowledge well to describe the features of persuasive text. They shared their ideas in pairs and were purposefully engaged in the task of designing a label for a new can of soup. In a Year 1 phonics activity, pupils made good progress in writing a sentence using their knowledge of a range of words with the 'ou' sound.

Intervention programmes are used very effectively to support pupils who are not making the expected progress, those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those pupils at the early stages of acquiring English as an additional language. As a result, there is little difference in the achievement of different groups of pupils.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to choose a healthy lifestyle and their involvement in extra-curricular sporting activities is strong. A few parents and carers raised an issue about bullying. Inspectors investigated this and found that although pupils explained that bullying did occur, they confirmed it was dealt with speedily. They told inspectors they feel safe at all times and expressed their confidence that any issues or concerns are dealt with and quickly resolved. Pupils' social, moral and spiritual development is strong. This is evident in their enthusiasm for learning, in the care they show to one another and the welcome and support they offer to visitors. They have a well-developed sense of their own culture but their knowledge of other cultures is limited. Sound basic skills, average attendance and positive attitudes mean pupils are satisfactorily prepared for the next phase of their school career

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*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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?

Positive relationships result in calm and safe classrooms in which pupils can share their ideas and views. Teachers use assessment information well to plan activities which meet the needs of most pupils. In the best lessons, teachers have very high expectations of all pupils. Time is used effectively so there is a good balance between teacher-led activities and independent learning. Effective, focused questioning, good links to prior learning and regular feedback from teachers result in pupils making good progress in their learning. In the less effective lessons, there is too much teacher talk and pupils do not always have enough time to work independently. As a consequence, the pace of learning is not brisk enough to secure good progress. The deployment of additional adults to support learning within classrooms is effective, although in some cases they are too passive in whole-class activities. In the best practice, additional adults provide valuable support in delivering intervention programmes both inside and outside of the classroom. Throughout the school, pupils' work is marked frequently. Nevertheless, in some books, teachers do not provide clear guidance to pupils about what they need to do to improve their work.

Sound use is made of external partners to support pupils' learning and well-being. Partnership with parents and carers is good and the school ensures appropriate support is provided to individuals to overcome any potential barriers to their success. The curriculum is enriched by pupils' good attendance at a variety of after-school clubs. Secure systems to monitor pupils' attendance and punctuality have been successful in improving attendance

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rates across the school. Targeted support and intervention with parents and carers have led to an improvement in the attendance rates for those pupils with the highest levels of absence.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>3</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

Since the last inspection, the governing body, together with the headteacher, has developed stronger leadership. The newly-appointed deputy headteacher, together with three phase leaders, have formed a strong team committed to school improvement. Over the last year, they have been relentless in driving forward improvement. As a result, almost all areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been tackled successfully. Phase leaders have a greater role in driving improvement and the governing body's strategic committee actively holds the school to account. As a result of significant improvements to the Early Years Foundation Stage, the youngest children make consistently good progress in all areas of learning. A clear, focused staff development programme underpinned by regular monitoring of classroom practice has resulted in greater consistency of practice and faster progress for all groups of pupils.

The headteacher is supported well by the deputy headteacher. She has introduced a new tracking system to identify pupils who are not making as much progress as expected. Pupil progress meetings are held on a frequent basis and this has contributed to greater accountability for pupil attainment and progress. Consequently, standards are rising, progress has improved rapidly and so achievement for pupils is satisfactory. The governing body's strategic committee meets fortnightly to discuss progress against the action plan. This has had a major contribution to improved governance.

Parents' and carers' overwhelmingly positive views reflect their appreciation that this is an inclusive school in which discrimination has no place and which gives their children a sense of belonging and equality of opportunity. Safeguarding procedures fully meet requirements, and are rigorously applied as a result of well-developed systems for quality assurance and risk assessment. Work is in progress to improve the promotion of community cohesion.

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*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Children in the Reception class make good progress in all areas of learning. This is the result of the very strong focus placed on meeting the needs of individual children. Good partnerships with local settings, especially the on-site playgroup, are helping to improve outcomes for the children. For example, the weaknesses in the current cohort in calculation, reading and writing have been assessed and addressed effectively. Teaching is good. A strong feature of provision is the good quality of relationships between adults and children. As a result, children develop as confident learners. There is good balance between the activities directed by the teacher and teaching assistant and those chosen by the children. The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and has resulted in significant improvement since the last inspection.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
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 Stage	2



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## **Views of parents and carers**

The number of questionnaires returned by parents and carers is higher than usually found. Almost all of them consider their children enjoy school and are kept safe. A very large majority feel teaching is good and the school is helping their children to have a healthy lifestyle. Parents and carers were supportive of other aspects of the school's work. A few were not so content with the manner in which unacceptable behaviour is dealt with or with the progress their children are making. A very small number did not feel that the school took account of their suggestions or concerns. Inspectors looked at these responses carefully. They observed pupils at work and play, talked to pupils, parents and carers and scrutinised school documentation. The findings from these activities are included within this report.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thorns 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 88 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 187 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	30	33	57	63	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	43	49	45	51	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	32	36	54	61	2	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	27	31	58	66	3	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	31	35	54	61	3	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	25	29	61	70	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	27	31	56	64	5	6	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)	21	24	60	68	3	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	23	26	61	69	3	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	21	24	47	53	16	18	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	26	54	61	9	10	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	24	27	51	58	9	10	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	32	36	49	56	5	6	1	1

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## 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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



19 May 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Thorns Primary School, Brierley Hill, DY5 2JY**

I would like to thank all of you for being so welcoming and helpful when we visited your school. We were impressed by your good manners and polite behaviour and loved your smiley faces! All of the team found it a pleasure to talk with you, to look at your work and listen to your views. We judged that your school no longer requires a notice to improve because it gives you a satisfactory education. This means that there are a lot of things that the school is doing right and some things that need to be improved. Here are some of the things that are best about your school.

You enjoy school, feel safe and trust the adults who care for you.

You have good attitudes to learning, you behave well and are considerate to others.

You feel safe because the staff take good care of you.

You know a lot about how to stay healthy.

Children in the Reception class get off to a good start.

I know that all the adults who help to run your school want it to be a good school. I have asked them to do three things.

To help you to make better progress in your work and reach higher standards, especially in mathematics.

To develop a more interesting curriculum, one which will motivate and excite you all.

To make sure that those of you who need it are given work to challenge and make your brains work even harder!

You all need to play your part in helping the school to become even better. The best way for you to do this is to come to school regularly, pay careful attention and make sure you do your best in every lesson!

Yours sincerely

Linda Rockey

Her Majesty's Inspector

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