

Thomas Hickman School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	110313
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	378079
Inspection dates	20–21 June 2012
Lead inspector	Lynn Alexander

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	403
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Baldwin
Headteacher	Andrew George
Date of previous school inspection	25–26 September 2008
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Age group	3–11
Inspection date(s)	20–21 June 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Lynn Alexander	Additional Inspector
Mehar Brar	Additional Inspector
Graeme Burgess	Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 28 lessons taught by 15 teachers. They also made short observations of pupils engaged in group work, heard pupils read and observed an assembly. In addition, meetings were held with pupils, members of the governing body, the headteacher and staff. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at its self-evaluation documents and plans for improvement, the data collected on pupils' progress, safeguarding information and minutes of meetings of the governing body. They considered the responses in 68 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, 33 from staff and 90 from pupils.

Information about the school

Thomas Hickman School is larger than the average sized primary school. The number of pupils who leave or join the school other than at the usual times is higher than that found nationally. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above average, as is the proportion of those who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special education needs supported at school action plus is also above average, but the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. The school runs a breakfast club, which was included in the inspection. The school had a subject survey inspection in mathematics in February 2011.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. It is not yet good because the quality of teaching is not yet consistently good or better across all classes. This results in pupils' progress in mathematics and English being no more than satisfactory. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 has been below average over time. Pupils' achievement is higher in English than it is in mathematics. However, most pupils currently in the school, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, make at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress from the time they join the school, and attainment is rising.
- Teachers make lessons interesting. However, the activities they plan are not always appropriately matched to pupils' abilities. As a result, pupils including disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and the most able do not always deepen their knowledge or develop their skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics quickly enough. There are some weaknesses in teachers' subject knowledge of mathematics. Teachers' feedback does not always show pupils how to improve, and they are sometimes not given enough time to correct their work.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and to others. There is a systematic approach to the management of behaviour that pupils understand and to which almost all respond well.
- Senior leaders and the governing body have set clear priorities for the school. Their concerted actions, including the management of teacher performance, have resulted in improvements in pupils' progress. They have introduced a curriculum that promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well and that appeals to their interests. However, the curriculum, although satisfactory overall, does not always sufficiently address gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills, particularly in English and mathematics.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics and accelerate pupils' progress, particularly in mathematics, by ensuring that:
 - pupils are consistently set work that is appropriate to their different abilities
 - curriculum planning enables all pupils to deepen their knowledge or develop their skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics more quickly.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or better by:
 - improving teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics
 - building on, and sharing, effective teaching strategies
 - ensuring that teachers' marking helps pupils understand how to improve their work and that they are given time to respond to this guidance.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Although most parents and carers feel that their children make good progress, inspection evidence shows that the majority of pupils make satisfactory progress from their starting points. However, achievement of pupils currently in the school is improving as a result of carefully targeted intervention and actions taken by school leaders to improve the quality of teaching, although some inconsistencies still remain. Children enter the Nursery class in the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are generally well below those expected for their age. By the end of their Reception year, most children's skills are still below those expected for their age. However, children make satisfactory progress and there are signs of improvement. This is as a result of the effective provision throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly in communication, language and literacy and mathematics. In an outstanding lesson in a Reception class, children demonstrated accelerated progress in their understanding of positional language. This was because the teacher designed practical opportunities for them to demonstrate their understanding of words such as 'over' and 'under'. The lesson was effectively linked to work on the story of 'The Gruffalo' that they had been reading.

Although attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 has been below average over time, most pupils currently in school are making satisfactory progress from their starting points, although achievement is showing signs of improvement. Pupils are on track to reach attainment, including in reading that is broadly average. Lesson observations during the inspection confirm that there are effective strategies for the teaching of phonics (letters and their sounds). Pupils read to inspectors with confidence and skill from the popular new reading scheme. In a good mathematics lesson, pupils followed up their visit to a farm by demonstrating that they could use and apply knowledge about halving to record new prices in a 'half-price sale'. The

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teacher extended pupils' learning by asking why the original prices were all even numbers. The most able pupils demonstrated that they could record their work independently and check it.

At the end of Key Stage 2, pupils' attainment has been below average in English, including reading, and also in mathematics over time. However, in 2011, pupils achieved broadly average standards in English. Pupils currently in Key Stage 2, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, are making at least satisfactory progress overall, although achievement is showing signs of improvement. However, too few pupils reach the higher levels because of a legacy of below average achievement in the past. Progress is better in English than in mathematics. This is because there are some weaknesses in teachers' subject knowledge of mathematics, and curriculum planning does not always sufficiently address gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills. For example, pupils in a Key Stage 2 lesson were unable to calculate area because they did not know the required number bonds and multiplication tables.

Quality of teaching

Teachers enthuse and motivate pupils. They promote the school's commitment to pupils' moral and social development by providing opportunities for turn-taking and through high expectations of good behaviour. Inspectors noted that most teachers encourage pupils to reflect and express their views in complete sentences, and pupils listen respectfully to their peers. Most parents and carers think their children are taught well. However, inspection evidence shows that teaching overall, including teaching of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, is satisfactory. Although some good and outstanding teaching was observed, the quality of teaching across year groups within the school is inconsistent, as is the quality of support provided by teaching assistants. Teaching is better in English than in mathematics. This is because some teachers do not have secure subject knowledge in mathematics. For example, in a Key Stage 2 mathematics lesson on finding the perimeter of a triangle the teacher confused pupils by referring incorrectly to height and width.

In the best teaching observed, teachers identified what pupils at different levels of ability were expected to learn and pupils knew their targets and what they needed to do to achieve them. However, this quality of teaching is not consistent in all classes. As a result, more-able pupils are not always directed towards sufficiently challenging activities to accelerate their progress. Activities are too challenging for some pupils because they do not have the required knowledge and skills to complete them. The teaching of reading is satisfactory overall. In good teaching observed in Key Stage 1, pupils were using suffixes and the teacher monitored progress well and adapted the activity as some pupils needed additional support. However, in a Key Stage 2 reading lesson pupils were asked to choose their level of challenge. Some chose work that was too easy and the teacher did not sufficiently challenge the more able. Teachers usually deal promptly with misconceptions in lessons by asking questions and giving feedback. However, teachers' marking does not always provide pupils with enough

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guidance on how to improve their work. Insufficient opportunities are given for pupils to correct their work and avoid the repetition of errors.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Most parents and carers express the view that behaviour is good at the school and inspectors agree. Pupils are polite and welcoming and get on well together. Behaviour is at its best in lessons when the quality of teaching is good or better and work matches pupils' needs. Pupils usually demonstrate good levels of interest, enjoyment and engagement in lessons, for example in paired discussions. Good relationships between adults and pupils are evident in lessons, as well as at playtimes, in breakfast club and around the school. Consequently, the school is a harmonious, inclusive and orderly learning community. This reflects the impact of the school's systematic approach to managing behaviour. Pupils understand the system and like the rewards. In the best lessons observed, teachers praised pupils for demonstrating positive behaviour as well as reprimanding any who transgressed the rules. Attendance and punctuality rates have improved since the last inspection and are now average.

Pupils have a good understanding of different forms of bullying, including name calling and cyber bullying. They talk with confidence about how adults deal effectively with any issues of bullying. Although a minority of pupils expressed concerns about behaviour, almost all pupils say they feel safe in school. Evidence shows that the school takes appropriate and prompt action and, when necessary, engages support and advice from relevant outside agencies. There are examples of marked improvements in the behaviour of some pupils, often demonstrating effective engagement with parents and carers. One parent commented, 'The staff have worked very hard to reduce bad behaviour and encourage my son.' Pupils have a generally good understanding of the risks they face and how to keep themselves safe in school and outside. They know about e-safety and substance abuse. Pupils could describe how to report health and safety concerns, such as a damaged fence, and thought the new swipe cards system of entry helped to keep the school secure.

Leadership and management

The headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher and the recently appointed assistant headteachers, has successfully instilled a sense of ambition and drive to improve the work of the school. School leaders demonstrate high expectations of accountability of teachers through rigorous performance management that has tackled underperformance. They provide effective professional development for teachers, many of whom are new to the profession. As a result, achievement of pupils currently in the school is showing signs of improvement. The school tackles discrimination and promotes equality for the different groups satisfactorily. As a result, there is evidence of improving progress for most pupils, although some work remains to be done to accelerate the progress of more-able pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. These factors, together with support and challenge from the knowledgeable and committed

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governing body and the local authority, contribute to the school's capacity to improve further.

The recently revised curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development through interesting and relevant topics. In a good Key Stage 2 science lesson about healthy diet related to the Olympics, pupils were able to reflect and discuss their views in groups. Pupils talk knowledgeably about different faiths and the needs of others and say they are 'grateful for what we have'. There is a wide range of clubs and educational visits that pupils enjoy. 'Inspiration days', such as 'Victorian day', contribute to their improving achievement in writing. However, the curriculum does not always provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to consolidate their basic skills in reading, writing, communication skills and mathematics.

The school has developed effective relationships with parents and carers that help them to support their children's learning, for example through curriculum workshops. There is good pastoral support for pupils and their families, including new entrants. As one parent commented, 'All staff are friendly and approachable and go to great lengths to meet our needs.' Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements and give no cause for concern.

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.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
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.



22 June 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thomas Hickman School, Aylesbury HP19 9HP

Thank you very much for the friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed coming to see your lessons and hearing you read. Your parents and carers are pleased with the school. This letter is to tell you that we found that Thomas Hickman School provides you with a satisfactory education. Here are some of the best things we found.

- You are helpful, thoughtful and polite.
- Almost all of you behave well in and around the school and you get on very well with your teachers, teaching assistants and your friends.
- You make satisfactory progress overall. All the staff care about how well you are doing and how happy you are.
- You enjoy your lessons so you come to school regularly and arrive on time.
- Your headteacher and the school's leaders are working to help make the school better and improve your progress.

To help your school to be even better we have asked your headteacher and senior leaders to make sure that:

- everyone is set work that is at just the right level to help them to make the best possible progress, especially in mathematics
- your teachers help you to understand what you need to do to improve your work and give you time to do it.

You can help your school by continuing to work hard and enjoying everything you do at Thomas Hickman School.

We send you our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Lynn Alexander
Additional inspector

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