

# Thorn Grove Primary School

Thorn Grove, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 5LD

**Inspection dates** 27–28 November 2012

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Pupils make outstanding progress in Years 1 and 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. Their current attainment in Year 6 is above average.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are outstanding, in lessons and around school. This has a very positive impact on their learning.
- The school has a very clear understanding of what it needs to do to improve. Good action planning is helping to raise standards rapidly.
- The headteacher, other senior leaders and the governing body have provided very strong leadership of teaching. Effective recruitment has helped raise the quality of teaching to a consistently good and occasionally outstanding level.
- The governing body ensures that the additional money to support particular groups of pupils is well spent. This has a good impact on the progress they make.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to use their thinking and number skills in practical and real-life situations.
- Teachers do not give pupils enough time to extend their vocabulary and speaking skills. Timetabling is inflexible and teachers do not always check how well pupils' are learning during lessons.
- Teachers do not have enough opportunities to work together and share good practice.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 17 lessons or parts of lessons, some jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings took place with the headteacher, staff, a sample of pupils, parents and carers, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- A number of pupils read to inspectors and talked about their work. Samples of pupils' work were scrutinised.
- Inspectors analysed and took account of the responses of 49 parents and carers to the online survey (Parent View), as well as two emails.
- They looked at key documents, including the school's self-evaluation, policies, performance data, procedures for safeguarding and the school improvement plan.

## Inspection team

Geof Timms, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Aileen King

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Thorn Grove is an average-sized primary school.
- A below-average proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are supported through school action.
- An above average proportion of these pupils are supported through school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs.
- A very small number of pupils are from a minority ethnic background.
- A below-average proportion of the pupils qualify for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school has the Activemark award and has achieved national Healthy Schools status.
- The school runs a before- and after-school club.
- There is a privately-run pre-school on the site which is inspected and reported on separately.

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

- Raise standards in mathematics in Key Stage 2 by creating more opportunities for pupils to extend their thinking skills and use their mathematical skills to solve problems.
  
- Make more of the teaching consistently outstanding by
  - providing more opportunities for pupils to talk and improve their vocabulary
  - spending more time checking pupils' learning during lessons and altering plans if necessary
  - making the timetable flexible enough to suit the needs of the pupils
  - extending opportunities for teachers to work together and learn from each other.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Most children start in the Nursery class with levels of knowledge and skills that are typical for children of that age. When they start in the Reception class children also have broadly typical attainment, although their communication and language skills are often weaker. Children make good progress and achieve well in their physical development, their personal, social and emotional development and aspects of their number work. They make less progress in their creative development and in their knowledge and understanding of the world.
- Pupils start in Year 1 with attainment broadly in line with that expected nationally. They make outstanding progress in Years 1 and 2 and this has been consistent over a number of years. Their current progress in reading, writing and mathematics is equally as strong as it has been in the past, and pupils reach above-average levels of attainment by the end of Year 2.
- Pupils' reading is well developed through good teaching about sounds and letters. In the 2012 national assessment of Year 1 reading skills the school achieved levels above the national average. A significantly above-average proportion of the pupils reach the higher levels in mathematics at the end of Year 2.
- Attainment by the end of Year 6 has been well above average since the last inspection, but standards fell in 2011 because too many pupils did not make the expected progress. The school successfully tackled some significant issues around staffing and the quality of teaching and, by the end of the summer term 2012, progress in Years 3 to 6 had improved. Boys achieved especially well and reached standards that were well above average in English and mathematics. The school's data and the evidence from observations and pupils' work show that pupils in the current Year 6 are back on track to make excellent progress and attain high standards.
- Standards in reading in Key Stage 2 have remained above average. Pupils read widely and make good use of books in researching topics. However, speaking skills throughout the school are less well developed and teachers do not always provide sufficient opportunities or time for pupils to talk with each other about what they are learning to share ideas or come to a conclusion.
- Standards in writing have been a recent focus for school improvement and this is having a positive impact on standards. The work to improve mathematics is more recent but many of the pupils in Year 6 have already made progress that is much better than that expected. Even so, throughout Years 3 to 6 teachers are not doing enough to help pupils solve mathematical problems through improved thinking and reasoning skills.
- The school's data and evidence from the inspection show little difference between the achievements of significant groups. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good and occasionally outstanding progress, especially in reading. Those supported by the additional money through the pupil premium also make good progress in line with their peers. High-ability pupils are often supported well. During the inspection two attended a writing workshop with other more-able pupils at a nearby school and they could clearly talk about the good progress they had made.

### The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is good and is having a positive impact on pupils' progress. This has especially been the case in reading and writing. The teaching of mathematics has been less

strong in the past but training and a range of professional development activities are strengthening teachers' understanding well. In a good lesson, for example, pupils in Year 5 were finding coordinates through a range of well-planned activities targeted at pupils' differing prior attainment.

- Teaching assistants often offer good support to teachers, particularly when working with pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable or those who find learning more difficult. Small-group or one-to-one work with these pupils is well planned and effectively delivered. This enables pupils with significant needs to take part in the full curriculum, make good progress and, at times, to be fully included and work alongside other pupils.
- Lessons are well planned. The pace of lessons is good and this holds pupils' interests and keeps them very involved in their learning. However, at times pupils spend too long listening to teachers or in whole-class groups on the mat. This is because of the way some lessons follow on from others and the timetabling is not flexible enough to allow teachers to alter their plans. Pupils spoken with also said they like different lessons to happen at other times such as, 'literacy or numeracy in the afternoon and art in the morning.'
- Teachers provide pupils with very useful feedback on their work. For example, excellent marking in Year 2 provides pupils with detailed feedback and ways they can improve their work. Pupils talk about how well teachers help them learn. Relationships are very strong between staff and pupils and this causes pupils to have very positive attitudes towards learning.
- Teachers assess work well, and keep effective records. They use this information, especially in writing and mathematics, to plan work that is based on pupils' prior attainment. In a small number of lessons teachers do not check on pupils' learning regularly enough, or change their plan in response to how well pupils are doing. Even so, teachers and other adults know the pupils well and demonstrate a very caring but challenging approach to individual pupils' learning.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**

- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. In lessons, they are very attentive and interested. Their positive attitudes have a real impact on the quality of their learning. Teachers manage pupils so well that the school's systems for rewards and sanctions are almost not evident. The school is a quiet and calm learning environment. Exclusions are rare but are recorded appropriately when they have been needed, including very good communication with parents and carers.
- Pupils talk about how safe they feel in school. This is because bullying is very rare and pupils are confident that, if there was any, it would be well dealt with by the staff. They talk about the adults they trust and who they would go to if concerned. Pupils have a good knowledge of different types of bullying, including through new technology. When asked to write about what they thought about the school, one pupil wrote, 'Thorn Grove to me is safety and care every day.' The inspection evidence supports this view.
- These positive attitudes are reflected in what pupils say about how much they enjoy coming to school. This is also the view of the majority of parents and carers. They talk about the lessons they enjoy and how they learn new things. Pupils show respect for each other and adults. They show pride in their work, such as the excellent folding and pop-up models made after an author visited.
- Attendance is consistently above average. The latest figures for the current term show well-above-average attendance. Parents and carers bring their children to school punctually and this,

along with their above-average attendance, is developing good habits for the next stage in their education. The before- and after-school club ensures pupils have a good, calm start to the day, and are well-looked after.

### **The leadership and management are good**

- The headteacher provides very strong leadership. She has a clear focus on raising standards and tackling any underachievement left as a legacy from an earlier year. She is well supported by senior staff and subject leaders who share the vision of improving the school even further. Detailed tracking of pupils' progress, regular checking on this in meetings with teachers and the setting of challenging targets are all helping to raise the school's expectations of all staff.
- The staffing of the school is very flexible and thoughtfully targeted at need. For example, extra adults are used to provide some very effective one-to-one work with some pupils who have some significant special educational needs. The money available through the pupil premium for supporting pupils is well-used to provide staffing and other resources, including the development of nurture work. When underachievement is recognised it is quickly addressed and any gaps are narrowing. This is happening in Year 5, for example, where the provision of extra teacher time has successfully helped with basic skills teaching. This approach ensures that all pupils have equal opportunities and are able to make as good progress as their peers.
- Performance management and appraisal has been used very successfully in recent years. This has helped provide support for inexperienced teachers and challenge for underperforming teachers. Professional development has had a very positive impact on provision in writing and this is also beginning to be the case in mathematics. The school is not complacent and willingly looks for outside support and expertise to help improve provision even further. The support provided through training and visits from representatives of the local authority have had a positive impact on the school's performance.
- The teachers and teaching assistants make a strong team. They talk very positively about their work and all say they are proud to be members of staff at the school. They work well together and take opportunities to spread good practice among themselves. The school has plans to provide more opportunities for this in a range of subjects so teachers can teach alongside each other and observe the best practice. The quality of teaching and learning has been boosted by the very successful recruitment of experienced teachers from elsewhere. In addition, the senior leadership team has been strengthened by successful internal appointments.
- The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Recent changes to the curriculum have been brought in successfully, although more remains to be done to provide more opportunities for creative activities. Children are provided with a good learning environment, including appropriate outdoors areas. The leadership of the provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is good. This has a positive impact on their learning and the records kept, links with outside agencies and links with parents and carers are all strong.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They develop a clear set of values and principles and show respect for, and a genuine interest in, others. The good curriculum has recently been developed by the school to include a more thematic approach so pupils can use the skills learned in one subject in another. This is still developing fully but is popular with pupils and is resulting in some high-quality learning, such as that in Year 2 on 'Space,' during which they visited the Science Museum.

### ■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body has a good understanding of the school’s strengths and weaknesses because governors work very closely and positively with the headteacher and senior staff. They also ensure good communication with parents and carers, including the recent introduction of a very useful annual report. They have been very effective in supporting recent performance management activities that have clearly strengthened the quality of teaching and progress pupils are making. The governing body has ensured that salary increases are linked to good or better teaching. It deploys and monitors the use of the money available through the pupil premium well and has a good understanding of its impact, especially checking the success of extra staffing. Governors spend a lot of time in school monitoring its work. Reports are made to the full governing body after, for example, individual governors have met with subject leaders. The governing body ensures all statutory requirements, including those for safeguarding, are met.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117277
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	403311

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	211
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Eric Marshall
<b>Headteacher</b>	Philippa Roy-Chowdhury
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	05 March 2008
<b>Telephone number</b>	01279 653002
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