

Thorns Primary School

Thorns Road, Quarry Bank, Brierley Hill, DY5 2JY

Inspection dates 19–20 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Most pupils, including those in the Reception class, make good progress in different subjects, including in English and mathematics.
- The very large majority of pupils in Year 6 make good progress.
- Teaching and learning over time is almost always good. Some is outstanding.
- Teachers and teaching assistants help pupils to acquire good knowledge and understanding of letters and sounds, which pupils apply well when reading and writing.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. They are friendly, polite, courteous, and helpful. Relationships are strong and support good behaviour in lessons and around the school
- Additional support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs results in good achievement because work is planned at the right level for pupils' abilities.
- Leaders rigorously check pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. This ensures continuous improvement and good progress for all groups of pupils. Leaders are very well supported by an effective governing body.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally, in lessons, activities are not set at the right level for pupils and some are too easy or too hard.
- Opportunities are missed for extended writing in subjects other than English.
- Pupils do not all do quite as well in mathematics as they do in English

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons. Four of these observations were completed jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Inspectors also observed break and lunchtime, and attended assemblies.
- Discussions were held with pupils, staff, the governors' strategic committee, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 18 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), parent responses to school questionnaires and spoke informally with parents.
- A wide range of documents were examined, including samples of pupils' work, the raising achievement plan, the school's self-evaluation, behaviour logs and safeguarding records.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and observed the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make).

Inspection team

Sherry Gladwin, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Stuart Ransom

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller-than-average sized primary school.
- The large majority of pupils are White British with below-average numbers of ethnic minority pupils or those who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is above average. This is additional funding for those children in local authority care, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children with a parent in the armed forces.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special education needs who are supported through school action is average, and the proportion that are supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school met the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school works in partnership with group of local primary and secondary schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that there is a high proportion of outstanding teaching across the school by:
 - ensuring that activities in lessons are set at the right level for pupils' different abilities
 - provide opportunities to practise their literacy skills and develop high levels of literacy by writing at length in different subjects
 - further developing the guided groups initiative in mathematics so that all pupils are helped to achieve as well in this subject as in English
 - sharing the best practice already present in the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start in the Reception class with skills and abilities below those typical for their age. Literacy and personal and social skills are especially low for some children. Skilful teaching and good provision ensure that pupils make good progress and join Year 1 with standards in line with national expectations.
- In 2012, attainment at the end of Year 6 was average, but that represents good progress in English and mathematics over those pupils' time in Key Stage 2. Pupils in Key Stage 1 make good progress, especially in reading and writing. They attained standards in 2012 that were more than two terms ahead of pupils nationally. They did especially well in writing, where they were more than a year ahead of the national average. However, writing is not as good as it could be throughout the school because pupils are not routinely given enough opportunities to write at length in subjects other than English.
- Although pupils do well, their attainment in mathematics has lagged behind that in English in both key stages. Action taken by the school has brought about improved progress in mathematics and school information shows that most pupils are on track to make better than expected progress in both English and mathematics in 2013.
- In 2012, the standards reached by pupils known to be eligible for free school meals were a year and a half behind their classmates in mathematics and four terms behind in English. The school has taken action to improve standards for these pupils, and school information shows that, across the school, pupils eligible for the pupil premium are achieving as well as all other pupils.
- In school information shows that disabled pupils and those who have special education needs are making progress similar to that of other pupils in the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good, and some outstanding teaching was observed.
- In the best lessons, pupils are given an opportunity to work in small groups and pairs to plan their learning, find out information, and carry out enquiries by themselves. Pupils learn well in these instances, showing creativity, responsibility, enthusiasm and enjoyment.
- Teaching over time promotes good progress and outcomes for pupils, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Teachers foster good relationships so that pupils of all ages are keen to learn.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively to support pupils who are disabled, those who have special educational needs and those who find learning difficult. They are well trained and work closely with class teachers to ensure that learning activities support and challenge pupils to achieve their best.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and include helpful comments which support pupils in gaining a better understanding of what they need to do to improve. In most lessons, pupils are given the opportunity to respond to marking and teachers check pupils' understanding before moving forward.

- Teachers and teaching assistants help pupils gain knowledge and understanding of phonics (the sounds that letters make), which they use well in reading and writing.
- The recent introduction of guided groups in mathematics lessons, where staff work more intensely with small groups of pupils, is helping to stretch pupils and focus on what they need to do to accelerate their learning in this subject.
- The quality of teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good, with some outstanding practice that exposes pupils to a wide range of interesting learning experiences. There is a balance of teacher-directed activities and those which children choose for themselves, making full use of the inside and outdoor areas.
- Teachers possess good subject knowledge. They plan lessons well, using their knowledge of pupils to plan stimulating and enjoyable learning activities, but too few opportunities are planned for pupils to write at length in other subjects such as history, geography or science.
- Very little teaching seen was less than good. In most lessons, teachers make sure that activities are planned to match pupils' capabilities and help pupils learn well but, at times, work planned either lacks challenge for more-able pupils or is too difficult for less-able pupils to do without help.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good and sometimes exemplary. Pupils, including children in the Reception class, demonstrate good social skills. They speak confidently when engaged in conversation and they are friendly, polite and helpful.
 - Pupils of all ages are keen to learn and they concentrate well in lessons. They listen carefully and often contribute thoughtful answers to teachers' questions. They show interest, enthusiasm and enjoyment for their learning.
 - Pupils develop their own rules, which form the basis of successful working partnerships and clear expectations across the school. They show respect for each other and for adults so that there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere in the school. Pupils enjoy being rewarded for good behaviour.
 - Assemblies are used to develop positive values and create a sense of awe and wonder. Pupils are given the opportunity to join in singing together, which builds community and a sense of belonging. They are given opportunities to reflect on their own experiences and consider how they can make personal changes that will lead to self-improvement.
 - Pupils say that they are happy and feel safe in lessons and at break and lunchtimes. They understand what constitutes bullying and feel that there is very little in school. When bullying does occur, they know who to report it to and feel that it is dealt with. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe on the internet and in the community.
 - The school works effectively to support families and pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable, and pupils with challenging behaviour. As a result, fixed-term exclusions are very low.
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- Attendance is a little lower than average but there has been an improving trend over the past few years. The school works hard to promote good attendance and regularly monitors the effectiveness and impact of its strategies. Praise in assemblies helps to encourage and celebrate good attendance.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and governors have set out an ambitious plan for improvement and these are communicated well to staff. They receive good support from subject leaders, the staff body as a whole and parents. There is a strong sense of community in the school and staff operate as a team to ensure that pupils benefit from good teaching and achieve their best. Leaders have made good progress in tackling the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection.
- The six-weekly cycle of checking the effectiveness of what is offered to pupils is one of the strengths of the school. The findings of this process contribute to the school's termly plans for improvement.
- The school works in partnership with a local group of schools to share skills and knowledge. This exchange, together with effective support from the local authority, has helped to improve the quality of teaching and learning, the arrangements for teaching subjects through interesting topics and themes, and the checking of pupils' progress.
- The local authority also provides effective support for the teaching of mathematics and English, which has improved the quality of teaching in these subjects.
- The close attention that is paid to improving the quality of teaching has resulted in rapid improvements in achievement over the past three years. For example, leaders regularly observe lessons and review pupils' work, making frequent checks on pupils' progress. However, teachers do not have the opportunity to learn from each other's practice and further improve the quality of teaching.
- Pupils enjoy the memorable learning experiences provided in different subjects, including visits to Cadbury World, or dressing up as ancient Egyptians and practicing hieroglyphics.
- The pupil premium is used to provide support for eligible pupils. As a result, the achievement of these pupils has improved. Funding has been used to provide staff and specialist training to support the teaching of phonics, one-to-one and small-group tuition, and to work with families to improve attendance and punctuality.
- The school promotes equality of opportunity well so that pupils from all backgrounds make good progress.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is effective. The governors' strategic committee challenges and supports leaders through rigorous monitoring. Governors have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses, including the quality of teaching and learning. They are well supported by the local authority and use the school's information about pupils' progress to check achievement regularly. They understand the importance of good teaching and the difference it can make to different groups. Governors manage resources and the deployment

of staff, providing effective management of the headteacher's and other staff performance. They are clear that only good or better teaching should be rewarded by a rise in pay. Governors are well informed about what is being done to tackle underperformance. They make good use of the pupil premium, can account for its use, and explain how it is contributing to raising the attainment of eligible pupils.

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

Unique reference number	103787
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	404905

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	187
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Cadwallader
Headteacher	David Priestley
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2011
Telephone number	01384 818285
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