

Thaxted Primary School

Bardfield Road, Thaxted, Dunmow, CM6 2LW

Inspection dates

6–7 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	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.

- Strong and determined leadership is improving all aspects of the school's work, including teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Teaching is mainly good. There is some outstanding teaching and none is inadequate.
- Pupils achieve well. Standards in reading and mathematics are above national expectations.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning and apply themselves diligently in all lessons. Behaviour in class and around the school is exemplary. Pupils work positively together and with the adults who teach them.
- Pupils feel safe in school. Incidents of bullying are extremely rare. There are effective systems in place to ensure the highest levels of security are maintained at all times.
- Governors know the school well. They are a powerful force in driving forward whole-school improvement.
- The school works successfully in partnership with all parents and carers.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally, the pace of pupils' learning slows. This is when teachers over dominate lessons by talking for too long. This limits the opportunities for pupils to draw conclusions for themselves.
- Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to use and apply their key literacy skills when writing independently in subjects other than English.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 16 lessons taught by nine teachers. Four of these lessons were jointly observed by the acting headteacher. Each teaching group was observed at least once.
- Inspectors observed pupils at play and attended a school assembly.
- Meetings were held with two groups of pupils, the headteacher and acting headteacher, staff with particular responsibilities, the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors.
- The lead inspector met with the School Improvement Partner. A representative of the local authority was also spoken to by phone.
- A number of pupils from Year 2 read to inspectors and shared their views on reading.
- Examples of pupils' work in their books were examined. Pupils explained to inspectors how their work is marked and how they respond to this marking.
- A wide variety of school documentation was examined. This included the school's self-evaluation and development plans, data relating to pupils' current progress, minutes of the governing body meetings, the management of staff performance and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safety.
- Inspectors took account of the 48 responses made by parents and carers to the online questionnaire (Parent View). The views of the 23 staff members who completed the staff questionnaire were also considered.

Inspection team

Judith O'Hare, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Westall

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- Most of the pupils are of White British heritage.
- A below-average proportion of pupils is known to be eligible for the pupil premium funding, which is additional funding schools receive to support certain groups of pupils including those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who are supported through school action is well below average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Five of the nine classes at the school cover mixed age groups.
- There have been recent and significant changes to the leadership of the school. The headteacher was appointed in January 2012. The deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2012. At the time of the inspection, the school was led by two of the senior leaders covering for the headteacher who was on maternity leave.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school so that more of it becomes outstanding, by:
 - creating more opportunities for pupils to work independently of their teachers
 - ensuring that, in all lessons, the pace is brisk enough to ensure that all pupils make maximum progress.
- Build on and sustain improvements made to pupils' progress and attainment in English, especially writing, by providing pupils with more opportunities to use and apply their grammar skills when writing independently in subjects other than English.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children join Reception with levels and skills which are broadly typical for children of their age. Consistently good teaching in a well-organised and exciting learning environment ensures that they make good progress in all areas of learning. Consequently, children leave Reception with attainment that is above age-related expectations.
- Reading is taught well throughout the school. Letters and the sounds they make (phonics) are taught effectively, both in Reception and in Key Stage 1. Pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress in this subject. In 2012, for example, results for all pupils in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 were notably higher than those seen nationally.
- The standards pupils achieve at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 have been above national averages for most of the last four years, although results dipped in 2012. The 2012 results also showed that pupils known to be eligible for free school meals as well as those supported through a statement of special educational needs made slower progress than other pupils.
- The school has taken prompt action. A new and improved tracking system has been introduced and there are now more rigorous checks on pupils' progress. This ensures that all additional support is properly targeted. The school's analysis of data, as well as evidence seen during the inspection in pupils' written work and in lessons, confirm the school's success. Pupils in the current Year 2 and Year 6 are on track to make good progress and to achieve results which are at least as good as in previous years.
- The school has made good use of its pupil premium funding to enhance learning through a wide range of additional opportunities, which include small-group work and one-to-one tuition. These pupils are now making better progress. School data shows that the gap in their performance is closing and there is little difference between them and their peers in both English and mathematics. This is a huge improvement on 2012, when pupils known to be eligible for free school meals were the equivalent of around two years behind their classmates in both English and mathematics.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs now do as well as, and sometimes better than, other pupils given their starting points because of the very well-targeted support they receive as a result of rigorous checking.
- Pupils benefit significantly from the strong focus placed on developing their mental mathematics skills. They enjoy these daily sessions and say these are helping them to make better progress. A clear example of this successful initiative was observed in a Year 6 mathematics lesson where pupils explained proudly how they had used these basic skills to calculate correctly both the amount of wood and the number of nails they would need to construct a box as well as the relative distance between each nail required to fasten the blocks of wood together.
- Pupils make slower progress in writing than in all other subjects. This is because they do not have frequent enough opportunities to use and apply their grammar skills in the writing they do in other subjects, and through tasks which encourage them to make independent choices about how and what they will write.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good because teachers plan interesting lessons. The tasks they set match pupils' needs well, enabling them to make good progress. For example, in a Year 3/4 English lesson, more-able pupils self-selected newspaper articles as the source for a summary report. Middle ability pupils completed a similar task using key words as a prompt. Lower attainers worked with the help of a teaching assistant to match sections of text with their different headings. The appropriate matching of tasks to pupils' ability was also evident in the work they did in small groups.
- Pupils enjoy their lessons and say that teachers make learning fun. They particularly like their topic-based projects and the chances they have in these lessons to engage in practical activities. One example given was the recent Key Stage 1 'Space' project and the opportunity to undergo 'astronaut training'.
- Teachers' marking in books is regular and detailed. Assessments made on pupils' performance are accurate. Pupils spoken to commented on how useful this marking is in helping them to understand how to improve their work. In particular, they talked about the colour-coding system which identifies positive success as well as next steps in learning.
- Support for learning from adults other than teachers is deployed well. Disabled pupils, those who have special needs, as well as those eligible for the pupil premium funding, benefit significantly from the support they receive.
- Relationships in class are highly positive. Pupils are keen to contribute their ideas, although, occasionally, teachers talk for too long. This limits the time pupils have to discuss their own ideas and to work independently. This over teacher direction was also evident in lessons where limited time was given for pupils to work with a 'talk partner' to consider their thoughts before giving individual responses to specific questions asked.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- This is a happy and cohesive learning community where all feel valued. Inspectors were struck immediately by the very warm welcome they received.
- Pupils work well together and with the adults who teach them. Parents and carers, teachers, pupils and visitors to the school all comment positively on the school's learning environment.
- Pupils are cheerful, polite and respectful. They listen well to each other and respect others' views. Good behaviour was observed in every aspect of school life throughout the inspection.
- Pupils say they feel safe at school. Incidents of bullying, including prejudice-based bullying, are extremely rare. Pupils have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including road safety, stranger danger and internet abuse. They say that, should a problem occur, they are confident there is always an adult on hand to help them.
- Pupils take an active part in maintaining good standards of behaviour at the school. For example, they undertake their duties proudly as members of the school council and as playground leaders.
- In lessons, pupils support each other well. They demonstrate good concentration skills and their commitment to working hard. Just occasionally, focus wanders in lessons. This is where pupils

are required to spend lengthy periods of time listening to their teachers. In these instances, pupils become more passive than active learners.

- Attendance is average although punctuality is good. Despite the school's best endeavours to improve attendance, a number of families continue to take holidays during term times.

The leadership and management are good

- New leadership of the school has brought about a fresh approach to whole-school improvements. The headteacher and leadership team are a powerful force and work effectively together.
- Leaders have overseen the development of a rigorous cycle of monitoring and the evaluation of teaching. Teachers benefit from the feedback they receive on their lessons. Faster pupil progress has been the result.
- Self-evaluation is accurate. Leaders' careful analysis of pupils' progress has been greatly enhanced by the introduction and use of a highly sophisticated data tracking system.
- The appointment of subject coordinators for English and mathematics has also contributed to improved pupil performance. Whilst progress in writing and improvements in pupils' independent writing skills remains a priority, improvements in performance in reading and mathematics are clearly evident.
- Positive teacher feedback from the voluntary staff questionnaire demonstrates how well staff have responded to the need for change.
- The school curriculum supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well. Pupils are given frequent opportunities to reflect on values in school and in the wider world, as evident in activities such as assemblies. A well-taught mathematics lesson on drawing maps to scale prompted equal consideration from pupils of the needs of the local community for additional green space and safety.
- The School's Improvement Partner provides good monitoring and consultancy advice. Local authority support for this good school is light-touch.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body bring a wealth of experience to the school, which includes recent teaching and school leadership skills. Governors understand clearly the strengths of the school and recognise fully the priorities for future development. The governing body provides good challenge. They are particularly effective in setting appropriate targets for whole-school improvement. Governors have had substantial training in the analysis of school data related to pupils' progress and attainment. They understand fully how current school performance relates to national standards and how the guidelines relate to the payment of staff. They have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching in the school. They regularly take part with leaders in observing lessons and provide good feedback to the leadership team on their findings. Sound financial management ensures that funds are allocated appropriately and well; in particular, those related to the pupil premium. All safeguarding requirements are met and all school policies are reviewed and updated as appropriate.

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	115288
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	412207

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	247
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Till
Headteacher	Kate George
Date of previous school inspection	10 October 2006
Telephone number	01371 830240
Fax number	01371 830232
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