

Thorndown Primary School

Hill Rise, St Ives, Cambridgeshire, PE27 6SE

Inspection dates 12–13 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Despite some strengths, the teaching has not yet succeeded in ensuring all pupils make sufficiently good progress in Years 5 and 6.
- Pupils' standards in writing are not high enough by the time they leave at the end of Year 6.
- The good practice with work on letters and sounds (phonics), which is established in the younger year groups, has not yet been applied to improve pupils' progress in reading in Years 5 and 6.
- Not enough pupils reach higher levels in the Year 6 national tests.
- At times, teachers simply talk for too long, particularly during introductions to lessons, thus limiting the time pupils have to work individually or learn more actively.
- Some teachers do not always use the information about pupils' progress and attainment to plan work at a sufficiently precise level of difficulty for different groups of pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- Good leadership from the headteacher and governing body has steered the school successfully through a very difficult period of school amalgamation and staffing changes.
- Leaders have helped to forge a teaching team which has established a good climate for learning and is ensuring a good capacity for improvement.
- Leaders at all levels know what needs to improve, and there is a determination to do what is necessary to help improve pupils' learning and progress.
- Pupils' personal development is good.
- The school is regarded highly by parents and carers.
- Adults and pupils have good working relationships and show good levels of respect for each other; this supports learning well.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning, and their general behaviour around the school, are good. This is because the school promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Pupils cooperate well together, both at work and at play; they know how to keep each other safe and take care of each other.
- Where data are used smartly to identify pupils who need extra help with their learning, they receive good support from teachers and teaching assistants and make good progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 26 lessons, including three which were seen jointly with members of the school’s leadership team. The 16 teachers working at the school on the inspection days, and their teaching assistants, were seen working with the pupils.
- Daily registration time was observed and inspectors attended an assembly.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils selected at random by the lead inspector. In addition, many informal opportunities were taken to talk with pupils.
- Inspectors heard a sample of pupils from Years 2 and 6 read and explored the pupils’ reading records.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents including development plans, policies, self-evaluation reports, various monitoring files, safeguarding and curriculum materials, information provided for families, and governing body documents.
- The school’s data and assessment records for the tracking of the pupils’ progress, over its first five terms as a new school, were scrutinised.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, subject coordinators, class teachers, teaching assistants, the special educational needs coordinator, administrative staff, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- The 42 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), and letters from parents, were taken into consideration. Inspectors spoke personally with a number of parents and carers during the inspection. The 31 responses to the questionnaire for school staff were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Michael Miller, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lynn Lowery	Additional Inspector
Sally Lane	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than average.
- Thorndown Primary School opened as a new school in September 2011, when its predecessor schools, Thorndown Infant and Thorndown Junior schools, amalgamated. The infant school was last inspected in March 2010, and the junior school in November 2008; both were judged good.
- Since the amalgamation, the school has expanded at a much faster rate than was originally envisaged. Work on the construction of a new school building on the site is due to start shortly.
- There are currently three classes in the Early Years Foundation Stage (the Reception Year), five in Key Stage 1, four in Years 3 and 4, and three classes in Years 5 and 6. Classes in Key Stages 1 and 2 are mixed-age groups and mixed ability.
- The majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds. A few come from other heritage backgrounds, including Mixed, and Asian or Asian British backgrounds. In addition, there are nearly 30% of the pupils whose ethnicity has not been declared.
- Most pupils speak English as a first language; the proportion known to speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional funding for particular groups, including those known to be eligible for free school meals) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus, or who have a statement of special educational needs, is well above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils by the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching by:
 - developing teachers' skills in the use of data to both monitor pupils' rates of progress and plan lessons more specifically to ensure sufficient challenge for individuals and groups of pupils
 - ensuring that lesson starters are more focused to give pupils the maximum possible time to participate actively in the work planned for lessons.
- Improve pupils' rate of progress and their achievement, and ensure that more pupils gain higher levels in the Year 6 national tests, by:
 - consolidating across the school the improvements in marking and target-setting in writing in order to improve attainment in English by Year 6
 - ensuring a consistent approach across the school to the teaching of the sounds that letters make (phonics), by extending good practice into Years 5 and 6.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils **requires improvement**

- Achievement requires improvement because not enough pupils make sufficiently rapid progress in Years 5 and 6. School data show a similar picture for pupils in the current Years 5 and 6 over their first five terms from September 2011. The school's own self-assessment recognises that, with these older groups of pupils, progress is not yet good and, therefore, requires improvement.
- In 2012, the attainment of pupils in Year 6 was average in reading and mathematics, but below average in writing for most groups. However, well-focused support for those few pupils for whom English was an additional language, and those with a statement of special educational needs, meant they did better than similar pupils nationally.
- Enhancing pupils' attainment and progress in writing is a major priority for the school. Recent improvements resulting from more sharply focused targets and marking, which identify clearly pupils' next steps in learning, are beginning to have an impact. However, this has still to be validated through the outcomes of the 2013 Year 6 national tests.
- In summer 2012, the gap in the performance of pupils who were eligible for the additional pupil premium funding and other pupils at the school was five terms in English and two terms in mathematics. School data show that the gap is closing rapidly; such pupils are now making faster progress overall than those not eligible for the funding. This is because teachers and their assistants make more effective use of data about how these pupils are doing and work either with small groups or individual pupils on a one-to-one basis. The premium is also being used well to support pupils with social, emotional or behavioural needs and enhance their learning.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, as well as those for whom English is an additional language, are supported well. They often make good individual progress in relation to their starting points and difficulties because of the personalised help they receive from both teaching and support staff. This is a good example of the ways the school demonstrates, in practice, its strong commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity.
- Children in Reception are taught systematically about letters and sounds (phonics). This enables children to tackle their reading and writing work with confidence. Such good practice enabled a slightly better than average proportion of pupils to reach the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2012. However, such methodical practice has yet to have sufficient impact in Years 5 and 6, particularly to support pupils' writing work.
- Progress is improving, and is good for children and pupils in the younger year groups. Children start school in the Reception Year with skills and levels of development which are typically in line with those expected nationally for their age. They make good progress and their attainment and development are above average by the time they transfer to Year 1.
- Many pupils in Key Stage 1 are making good progress from their individual starting points. So far this year, some pupils have progressed at over twice the rate normally expected nationally. The foundations laid in the Reception classes and the establishment of a secure climate for learning across the new school are starting to pay dividends.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Some teachers simply talk too much at the pupils during lesson introductions. 'Carpet sessions' often go on too long, with pupils remaining passive listeners. This limits the time pupils have to undertake the work planned for the lesson and, therefore, their opportunities to make good progress. Occasionally, this also limits the time available for pupils to complete, for example, more extended writing work. Too much teacher talk also restricts the scope for teaching assistants to support those pupils who need extra help.
- The headteacher and governing body appreciate that not all of the teachers at the new school have developed sufficient skills to interpret and make full use of the data collected regularly on pupils' progress. This forms a central part of the targets set for teachers throughout the school. Some teachers are still developing the skills necessary to make consistently good use of progress data to plan lesson which challenge pupils to make accelerated progress and gain higher levels in their work.
- There are some important strengths in the teaching. Most teachers show that they are adept at asking questions of the pupils, both to check their understanding and provide an extra element of challenge in a lesson. The pupils show that they are keen to rise to such challenges when given the opportunity. Marking is regular and oral feedback helpful; pupils speak of how this enables them to understand their next steps in learning and what to improve.
- Assessments are particularly good in the Reception classes. Regular, daily observations by teachers and teaching assistants are collated in the children's achievement records. These include photographs, samples of children's work and contributions from parents and carers. These provide a clear picture of children's progress and development across all aspects of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The teaching contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and helps them to develop as responsible young citizens. Outstanding teaching, learning and progress were seen in a philosophy lesson for pupils in Years 5 and 6. Here, the teacher enabled the pupils to develop naturally a discussion about the concept of 'fear' into an exploration of the question of 'loss'. The calibre of discussion and debate was high. Pupils showed excellence in the quality of their thinking skills and openness to the ideas and arguments of others.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The foundations for pupils' good attitudes to learning are being laid securely from the Reception Year, and by the positive atmosphere for learning which is created by staff across the school. Even when pupils may be left as more passive learners, the minute they are able to get down to active work, they do so without fuss. They develop self-confidence, socialise well, respect their teachers and maintain good concentration levels throughout the day.
- The school is a friendly community within which pupils work and play in safety and with confidence. They take on responsibility readily and show a good awareness of the implications, dangers and consequences of the different types of bullying. School records, the responses to Parent View and inspectors' observations all confirm that behaviour is typically good.
- Pupils who sometimes find school difficult are supported well by the staff who help them to understand how to manage their behaviour. Pupils say that, whatever their background, they are treated fairly and no-one is made to feel different. Behaviour is managed well, often by the pupils themselves.

- The pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development was shown through the way they sang enthusiastically, in an assembly, the song *Make Someone Happy*. The pupils appreciate that they can all make an important difference to one another.

The leadership and management are good

- Discussions with senior leaders, governors and the local authority show that, over the last three to four years, the new school and its predecessors went through a very difficult period. It is testament to the leadership of the headteacher, deputy headteacher and governing body that this new school has overcome its problems and is becoming increasingly successful.
- As a result of nearly half the teachers being new to the school, the headteacher's focus on team-building during the school's first year and the creation of a good climate for learning has had an excellent impact. This is underpinning the school's good capacity for improvement.
- Staff questionnaires are unanimous in their support for the school's leadership, and almost all those parents responding to Parent View say they would recommend the school to others. In discussions with inspectors, parents were entirely positive about the school and its support for their children and families. Staff and pupils respect each other.
- Pupils whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable are given extensive support by well-trained staff and, through them, access to other, relevant professional agencies. This is a further example of the ways the school and its leadership ensure equality of opportunity for its pupils.
- There is good leadership right from the start of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The good practice seen in the Reception classes is providing a firm foundation for pupils' attainment and progress in future year groups. Furthermore, throughout the school, teachers have developed a wide range of subjects and topics which make learning interesting. Learning is enhanced by a programme of extra-curricular activities which adds to and broadens pupils' experiences.
- Joint lesson observations show that senior leaders evaluate accurately the quality of teaching. They monitor lessons and learning regularly, and are becoming increasingly successful in advising and coaching staff to improve further their professional skills. As a result of this approach, staff are open in sharing and discussing their ideas. This aids the sharing of good practice. Staff are keen to attend training, and discussions show they put what they have learnt into practice. Subject coordinators demonstrate good support for their colleagues.
- Leaders, at all levels, have shown they can make a difference, and their current success with the younger year groups of pupils confirms this. However, there is still work to be undertaken to help teachers sharpen their use of data on pupils' progress and develop further their lesson planning. This is to ensure that pupils have the maximum time to be involved fully in lessons and that standards in writing improve further across the school, particularly in Years 5 and 6.
- There are well-established links between the school and its local authority. This is benefiting the school well, including in its initiatives to develop teaching and improve progress.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is well informed about the school's performance. Governors are actively helping the school in its drive to make more effective use of performance data, and have ensured that this element is included in targets for teachers' professional development and is used as the basis of determining pay and promotion. There are systematic checks on the

effectiveness of teaching.

- Governors are able to compare and contrast the school’s performance with others nationally. There is a clear understanding of how and why pupils make progress, and groups of governors visit the school regularly to gain an understanding of the school’s work to promote learning.
- The governing body knows how the pupil premium is allocated, produces a statement showing how it is spent and monitors carefully the impact of this spending.
- Together with the headteacher, the governing body ensures procedures and policies for safeguarding pupils are fully in place.

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	136814
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	400289

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	383
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Frank Newton
Headteacher	Lynda Williams
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01480 375103
Fax number	01480 375104
Email address	office@thorndown.cambs.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013

