

Thomas Hickman School

Belgrave Road, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, HP19 9HP

Inspection dates 15-16 January, 4-5 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that has serious weaknesses.

- Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is low and has not improved enough in the last three years.
- Teaching in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is not good enough to ensure that pupils make sufficient progress from very low starting points to catch up with where they should be at the end of Year 2.
- Teachers' questioning is not always used sufficiently well in lessons to challenge pupils to achieve their best.
- Adults do not have high enough expectations for all pupils, particularly those where family circumstances are challenging.
- Teachers' low expectations of handwriting and presentation are holding pupils back.
- Information about the standards pupils reach is not used well enough to help them catch up with where they should be.
- The school's plans for improvement are not clear enough to help teachers know exactly what actions they need to take. Governors do not hold school leaders rigorously to account for the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make.

The school has the following strengths

- School leaders' hard work to improve behaviour has been successful and consequently pupils are well behaved and polite.
- Recent work to improve the teaching of the sounds letters make has had a good impact and as a result pupils are starting to make better progress in reading.
- There are better opportunities to write for longer periods and this is helping to improve the quality of pupils' writing.
- An increased focus on regular attendance has improved this area of the school's work.
- There is a high priority on ensuring the safety of all pupils and this is reflected in the pupils' view that they feel safe and secure in school.
- Pupils have a good understanding of different cultures and beliefs and show consideration and care for each other.
- Some pupils are beginning to make better progress as a result of new ways of teaching mathematics.

Information about this inspection

The inspection was carried out in two parts on 15-16 January 2014 and 4-5 March 2014

At the initial inspection:

- Inspectors observed 24 lessons or parts of lessons across the school. Four of these were observed jointly with the headteacher and other senior leaders. Inspectors looked at work in pupils' books with senior leaders, heard two groups of pupils read, and met with representatives of the school council and another group of older pupils.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including minutes of the governing body meetings, assessments and records of pupils' progress, the school's checks and records relating to safeguarding and child protection, the performance management of teachers and the school improvement and self-evaluation plans. A recent external review carried out by the local authority was also looked at.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior staff, two governors and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors spoke informally to parents at the beginning and end of the school day and took into account the views expressed in a letter received from a parent. There were not sufficient responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) for the responses to be considered.

During the second part of the inspection:

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons across the school. The headteacher and deputy headteacher joined inspectors to observe ten of the lessons.
- Meeting were held with the headteacher; deputy headteacher; the assistant headteacher and year group leaders; the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body; the special educational needs co-ordinator; the leader of Early Years Foundation Stage and three representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors met with pupils, looked at pupils' work, attended an assembly and observed pupils at lunchtime.
- The inspectors observed the school's work. They scrutinised a range of documents including those related to the tracking of pupils' progress, the school's records of checks on the quality of teaching, the school improvement plan, the school's self-assessment, and minutes of meetings held by the governing body. Inspectors scrutinised checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children. The recent external review of governance including use of the pupil premium was also looked at.

Inspection team

Adam Hewett, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Diane Rochfort

Additional Inspector

Carol Worthington

Additional Inspector

Amanda Gard

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ann Henderson

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above average, with the majority of these being of Pakistani heritage. Nearly a third of the pupils speak English as an additional language which is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is above average. This is additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children of service families or those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action is well above average. The proportions identified for additional support through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.
- A breakfast club is provided each day.
- The school meets the government's floor targets which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure teaching in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 helps pupils catch up so they reach at least the standards expected for their age by the time they are 7 by:
 - ensuring adults make useful observations and assessments to plan work at the right level of challenge so pupils move on in their learning
 - using questioning effectively to probe pupils' understanding and really make them think hard.
- Increase the proportion of pupils attaining higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics and the proportion of pupils making expected or better progress to at least in line with the national average at the end of Year 6 by:
 - making sure all adults have high expectations for all pupils, including those with challenging family circumstances
 - making sure all teachers have high expectations of presentation and quality of work so pupils always strive to produce their best
 - making best use of the information available to act quickly when pupils fall behind.
- Improve the school's development plan so that it:
 - has specific and measurable targets for improvement
 - indicates clear actions and timelines to show how and when targets should be achieved so that governors can monitor the plan's progress and hold leaders accountable
 - sets out responsibilities so everyone knows their part in raising standards.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage with skills well below those which are typical for their age. They make limited progress during Nursery and Reception so that when they enter Year 1 standards are still below those found nationally. Their skills in reading writing and mathematics are not developed well enough so they are not sufficiently well prepared for Key Stage 1.
- In Year 1 and Year 2 expectations are too low and pupils do not make enough progress to catch up with where they should be. For the past three years standards in reading writing and mathematics at the end of year 2 have been well below the national average.
- Historically progress has been too slow in Key Stage 2. Pupils have not been prepared well enough for secondary school because, for the past three years, too few pupils have reached the required standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of pupils making expected progress in reading and writing is increasing but too few pupils make better progress to close the gap from their low starting points. Progress in mathematics remains too slow although there are some early signs of better progress in Year 5, where new strategies are being tried out.
- The proportion of pupils identified as more able is very low. By the end of Year 2 and Year 6 too few pupils reach the higher levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. More able pupils are not consistently expected to tackle more demanding work and this limits their progress.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make progress at a slower rate than their peers. The impact of intervention programmes is not tracked carefully enough to ensure they are receiving the right support.
- Pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium start school with attainment below their peers. They make progress at a similar rate to other pupils in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 so that, by the end of Year 2, they are still behind other pupils. Progress improves in Key Stage 2 and by the end of Year 6 their attainment is broadly in line with their peers in reading and mathematics and a term behind in writing.
- In 2013 pupils of Pakistani heritage in Year 2 attained slightly better than other pupils. The progress and attainment of this group was in line with other pupils in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6.
- Progress in writing has improved over the past three years and is now broadly in line with that found nationally. This is due to increased opportunities for pupils to produce extended pieces of writing about a range of subjects.
- There was a significant improvement in 2013 compared with 2012 in the proportion of Year 1 pupils who met the expected standard in the national screening check for phonics (how letters and sounds combine to make words). Standards in reading in 2013 were well below those found nationally but current data indicate that pupils are now making better progress in this subject because they are applying their understanding of letters and sounds. Pupils show an interest in books and an enjoyment in reading.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- The quality of teaching is poor in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 so pupils do not move on fast enough from their low starting points. Teaching is better in Key Stage 2 but not yet consistently good enough to help pupils catch up quickly from their previous underachievement.
- Teachers plan a range of tasks for each lesson but these are not always at the right level of difficulty because teachers do not all take enough account of what pupils can already do and expectations are too low in many classes. In the Nursery and Reception classes, children too often wander between activities because learning is not well structured. Across the school

teachers often fail to guide pupils carefully enough to select the right task. As a result too many pupils are not sufficiently challenged and progress stalls.

- Work is marked regularly but feedback does not help pupils know how well they are doing and how to improve their work. Where pupils make corrections these are not followed up by the teacher to ensure the pupil has understood what they needed to do. The majority of pupils are not aware of the levels they are working at and where they need to aim for. They do not have clear targets to move them on in their learning.
- Pupils' understanding is not checked regularly in lessons, which hampers progress. Too often teachers ask undemanding questions and do not expect pupils to justify their ideas: they do not make pupils think hard enough. Where used well, questions are probing and well matched to the needs of the different abilities of pupils: they provide appropriate levels of challenge which helps pupils to acquire skills and knowledge more quickly.
- Presentation and handwriting are of a poor standard across the school because teachers have low expectations. Mistakes in letter and number formation are left uncorrected in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that pupils form bad habits which they continue further up the school. Teachers condone sloppy presentation in mathematics, for example books showed graphs drawn without a ruler and work which was hard to read because it was not neatly set out. Older pupils have not developed a fluent style of writing to enable them to write quickly and neatly. Recently started work books for mathematics in Year 5 set higher expectations on which to build.
- Good use of teaching assistants in some classes provides well-structured support so that pupils make suitable progress. However in other lessons, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage, additional adults do not extend children's skills well enough and progress is less rapid.
- The teaching of reading is improving. A recently introduced whole-school approach to the teaching of phonics and the development of writing skills is beginning to have a positive impact on the progress that pupils are making in reading. Teachers use a common approach that engages pupils' interest and builds daily on skills already learnt. In a Year 5 lesson, pupils were keen to explore the use of poetic language and confidently identified features such as metaphors and personification.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils' behaviour has improved greatly over the past three years due to the consistent and clear approach that is adopted by all staff.
- Pupils display positive attitudes, are generally very keen to learn and are willing participants in lessons. Pupils are proud of their school and appreciate the opportunities it offers them.
- Bullying of any kind is extremely rare. Pupils are very confident that if it occurs it is dealt with promptly and effectively. Pupils are aware of the different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel safe and happy in school. They are confident adults will listen to any concerns and act on them, saying, "You know you've got someone there for you." They know about road safety and how to keep themselves safe when using the internet.
- Pupils take on responsibilities well. They value the opportunities the school council offers them and know they are actively involved in helping to keep everyone safe and happy in school.
- The school's positive and supportive environment promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. Trips, visits and other enrichment activities, such as an innovative arts based project in Wendover Woods, help to build the confidence and self-esteem of all pupils, especially those who are the most vulnerable.
- Attendance fell below average in 2012 -13 but school leaders acted decisively to improve this so it is now broadly in line with national figures. Direct action is taken where parents fail to ensure pupils attend regularly.
- Parents and staff are very positive about behaviour and safety in the school. Parents commented on the improvement in behaviour over recent years and said their children were always happy to come to school.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because leaders have not secured consistently good teaching across the school to raise standards.
- Senior leaders provide helpful models of good teaching. They have successfully coached individual teachers in Key Stage 2 to improve aspects of their teaching and pupils' behaviour. They know which areas of the school's work need development because they have carried out useful audits of learning. However findings have not been followed up quickly enough to ensure rapid improvement especially in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.
- The school development plan lacks detail. There are no clear outcomes for targets, or timelines to show when actions will be completed. It does not show exactly who is responsible for each action and how it will be checked and evaluated. This makes it hard for staff to know what they need to do and by when.
- Teachers collect a range of information about how well pupils are doing and use this to plan their work. However in the past expectations have been too low and information about pupils' progress has not been used effectively to target pupils who need extra help. Teachers have not had high enough expectations of what pupils are capable of. This is particularly the case for students who have challenging family circumstances. Meetings to discuss pupil progress are now better focused but there is much to be done to help pupils catch up with where they should be.
- The school's leaders and managers do not have a strong enough grasp of the work done to support pupils with special educational needs. The impact of intervention work is unclear because the success of extra help for individual pupils is not routinely checked. Some pupils remain on ineffective support programmes for too long and do not make enough progress.
- Training to introduce the new phonics programme was well planned by senior leaders to ensure all members of staff understood and embraced the need for change. The positive impact of the programme can be seen in rising standards in phonics and reading across the school.
- Links with parents are very good. Senior leaders have developed 'The Hub' to provide a welcoming base for a wide range of family learning opportunities to raise achievement. It is too early to measure the effect on standards but parental feedback shows they value these courses that help them look after their children and develop their skills at home.
- The school is committed to equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination. The work undertaken in recent years on improving behaviour has resulted in all groups of pupils feeling safe within school.
- The school ensures that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well supported through assemblies, visits, visitors and musical, sporting and artistic activities.
- The primary sports funding has been used to fund specialist coaches to increase the range of sporting activities available in school. A wider range of experiences is provided however it is too early to measure the impact of this spending.
- Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and reflect the very high priority that the school places on child protection.
- The local authority has provided useful support through a targeted project for development. This has improved the quality of teaching and governance since September 2013 but has not been effective in raising pupils' achievement.
- **The governance of the school:**

There have been several changes to membership of the governing body since September 2013. Governors have a good range of skills and have recently started to hold school leaders more tightly to account by asking challenging questions. The new Chair of Governors understands the need to focus on the quality of teaching and how this affects standards. However governors' monitoring is not linked closely enough to the school's development plan to help them check exactly how well the school is doing. This limits their ability to make decisions about the links between teachers' performance and pay. Governors understand how the pupil premium funding

is spent but lack detailed information about its impact on standards. An external review of governance, including a review of pupil premium, has recently been completed to help governors to improve.

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	110313
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	431009

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	455
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Sherwell
Headteacher	Andy George
Date of previous school inspection	20-21 June 2012
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