

Thorntree Primary School

The Greenway, Thorntree, Middlesbrough, North Yorkshire, TS3 9NH

Inspection dates

6–7 February 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Between Years 1 and 6, too few pupils make consistently good progress. The standards attained at the end of Year 6 are below average, especially in reading. Too few pupils reach the higher levels of attainment at the end of Years 2 and 6.
- Pupils' early reading skills are not strong enough. There are too many older pupils whose reading is not yet fluent.
- Teaching is not consistently good. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are not always high enough, especially for the most able, who sometimes find work too easy.
- The quality of marking is variable. It does not always give pupils the guidance needed to help them improve or set them challenging targets for learning.
- The pace of lessons sometimes does not enable pupils to achieve well. Activities sometimes fail to capture pupils' interest and so some pupils lose concentration and lack motivation. As a result, pupils' behaviour is not always good. Not all teachers insist that their pupils display the highest standards of behaviour at all times.
- Senior leaders and governors have not ensured that there is a consistent approach to teaching or to the management of pupils' behaviour. This has impacted negatively on pupils' progress over time.

The school has the following strengths

- Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where teaching is good. Children are happy and enjoy a range of interesting activities.
- Senior leaders' focus on improving the quality of teaching in mathematics is paying dividends. As a result, pupils' progress is accelerating and standards are rising.
- The senior leadership team, including the governing body, are leading improvements strongly. Their determination to improve the outcomes for pupils is shared among staff and morale is high. Governance is increasingly robust.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe is good. Pupils say that they feel very safe in school.
- The school has coped extremely well with the disruptive effects of lengthy refurbishment work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 25 lessons or parts of lessons, two of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read, observed pupils at playtime, lunchtime and in the breakfast club. They observed teaching assistants working with pupils.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, staff, governors, pupils and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a range of evidence including: the school's evaluation of its own work, the school's information about pupil progress and documentation relating to teachers' performance, pupils' behaviour, attendance, minutes of meetings of the governing body and the school's safeguarding procedures.
- Inspectors took account of the school's own recent questionnaire for parents as there were insufficient responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) to generate any results.
- Inspectors looked at a range of other evidence including school displays, its website and work representing the school's wider achievements beyond the classroom.

Inspection team

Philip Scott, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Zoe Westley

Additional Inspector

Dominic Brown

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils whose parents serve in the armed forces, is high. Over four-fifths of pupils are known to be eligible.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is average and those supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is high.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school provides a daily breakfast club for pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - making sure that lessons go at the correct pace, allowing those who are able to move on quickly and providing more time and support to pupils who need it
 - ensuring that teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are always high enough
 - making sure that teachers plan and provide challenging activities so that all groups of pupils, learn more quickly, especially the most able
 - extending the existing good practice when teachers mark work so that all pupils are set demanding targets and marking explains clearly how to reach them.
- Accelerate the rates of progress of all groups of pupils in order to raise attainment, especially in reading, by:
 - making sure that the teaching of letters and the sounds they make is rigorous, consistent and frequent, so that pupils become fluent readers more quickly
 - continuing to implement and set firmly into place the school's new approaches to the teaching of English and mathematics so that pupils' progress becomes more rapid and sustained.
- Ensure that pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are consistently good by:
 - making sure that in lessons tasks capture pupils' interest
 - developing pupils' love of learning and pride in their school, so that they want to do their best and behave well at all times for themselves
 - ensuring that all school staff share high expectations of pupils' attitudes to learning and that approaches to managing behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, are consistent.
- Further improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - sharing more widely the good and outstanding practice that currently exists in the school to ensure a consistency of approach to teaching across the whole school
 - ensuring that senior staff accurately check the progress of the most-able pupils more carefully when observing lessons.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- By the end of Year 6, pupils' attainment in English and mathematics overall is below average, especially in reading. Between Years 1 and 6, pupils' progress is inconsistent and, therefore, requires improvement. Given their previous starting points, too few pupils reach the higher levels of attainment at the end of Year 2 and Year 6.
- The vast majority of children start the Nursery with skills and knowledge that is significantly lower than those typical for their age. A large proportion has underdeveloped speech and language skills. Children settle quickly and happily in the Early Years Foundation Stage and make good progress as result of effective teaching. They enjoy a broad range of interesting activities and benefit from well established routines, building positive relationships with staff and with each other. For example, a group of children enjoyed drawing and confidently describing shapes such as a semi-circle, a hexagon and a star, working cooperatively. Despite this good start, a below average proportion of children reaches a good level of development by the start of Year 1.
- Pupils make expected progress in Years 1 and 2. Attainment at the end of Year 2 is below average in reading, writing and mathematics. However, there are signs of improvement, particularly in mathematics.
- Achievement in Key Stage 2 requires improvement, particularly in reading. In Year 6 in 2013, an average proportion of pupils made the expected rate of progress in writing and mathematics. However, fewer pupils did so in reading. Too few pupils made better than expected progress across the subjects. However, progress in Key Stage 2 is now speeding up in reading, writing and mathematics, but is doing so more quickly in mathematics. This is due to a concerted and successful approach to improve the way mathematics is taught. Although similar changes have been made to the teaching of reading and writing recently, attainment remains below average, because there has been insufficient time for these changes to make a significant impact.
- Achievement in reading requires improvement. The proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the Year 1 screening check in phonics (letters and sounds) is below average. Inconsistencies in the teaching of phonics over time mean that pupils' reading skills do not develop at a good enough rate as they move up the school. A more systematic approach to the teaching of phonics has now been adopted. However, this has yet to have a significant impact on pupils' reading skills. Some younger pupils still struggle to read tricky words. Older pupils are given too few opportunities to practise their skills to become fluent readers.
- The achievement of the most able requires improvement. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels of attainment at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 is below average in reading, writing and mathematics. The most-able pupils do not do as well as they can because their work sometimes lacks challenge. Expectations of what they can achieve are not always high enough.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium make similar progress to that of others in the school. By the end of Year 6, they attain standards that are broadly the same as similar pupils nationally in writing and mathematics, but attainment in reading is behind this. In Year 6 in 2013, the attainment of eligible pupils, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, was the same as that of their classmates in writing, two terms behind in mathematics and three terms behind in reading. This gap is now narrowing because the pupil premium funding is used wisely to provide a range of additional support and to give access to extra-curricular activities. Although this shows the school's commitment to promoting equality of opportunities for all, variations in achievement across the school means that it is not yet fully successful.
- Early identification of pupils who are at risk of falling behind, results in good provision for pupils who find learning difficult, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. The school offers good support through the targeted deployment of skilled teaching assistants whose work effectively supports both those pupils identified and other groups who find some aspects of work difficult. Even so, these pupils do not yet make consistently good progress due to inconsistencies in teaching quality across the school.

The quality of teaching**requires improvement**

- Although there is an increasing proportion of good teaching following a strong and on-going drive from senior leaders to improve its quality, it has not yet been consistently good enough over time to raise standards and accelerate pupils' progress, especially in reading. As a result, teaching requires improvement.
- Expectations of what pupils can achieve are not always high enough. Activities planned by teachers sometimes lack challenge and especially the most-able pupils occasionally find their work too easy.
- The tasks provided do not always interest pupils enough or are not designed in such a way as to deepen their understanding. The pace at which lessons move forward is not always suitable for pupils, being too fast for some and not fast enough, especially for the most able; consequently, some pupils lose concentration. This sometimes results in low-level misbehaviour which disrupts learning. Approaches to managing misbehaviour in lessons are inconsistent. Not all teachers insist that pupils always display high standards of behaviour.
- Teachers mark pupils' work diligently. In Years 5 and 6, marking is particularly effective. Pupils are set challenging targets and comments in marking clearly explain to pupils how to reach them. As a result, pupils are very clear about how to improve their work and so make faster progress. These approaches are not as evident in other year groups.
- The teaching of mathematics has improved and, as a result, pupils are reaching higher standards and making faster progress. Pupils are encouraged to use their mathematical skills to solve a range of different problems. In an outstanding Year 5 lesson, pupils were able to convert improper fractions to decimal fractions and percentages, and use this knowledge to solve a range of practical problems in a carousel of different challenges.
- The teaching of English is also improving as a result of the recent introduction of a more systematic and structured approach to reading and writing. Younger children in Reception enjoyed working with the teacher to read a story, using word and picture clues to successfully find the answers to questions. Daily reading sessions led by teachers and teaching assistants on letters and sounds are helping pupils to learn to read more quickly, such as in Year 1 where pupils were able to read and write words such as 'turn', 'hurt' and 'burn'. Even so, the teaching of phonics has not yet been rigorous, consistent or delivered frequently enough over time to enable pupils to quickly become fluent readers and make good progress.
- Achievement in writing is improving because teachers are providing pupils with more opportunities to write longer pieces of work, often using other subjects to provide a focus and purpose for their writing. In a Year 6 lesson, pupils used the novel 'Goodnight Mr Tom' as a basis for a piece of writing about evacuees leaving a train station during the Second World War. They made good progress as a result of good questioning by the teacher, careful planning and sharing ideas with each other.
- Teaching assistants are fully involved in supporting pupils' learning both during lessons and when working with small groups of pupils outside of lessons.
- Although new approaches to the teaching of English and mathematics are leading to better progress, they have not yet been firmly set in place in all classes and so pupils' progress is not yet rapid and sustained.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**requires improvement**

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour in lessons and around school are variable. Inspectors observed some excellent examples of pupils being courteous and polite, but also, too frequent examples of off-task low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons and occasional jostling when re-entering the building after break or leaving the dining hall.

- On many occasions, pupils' driving motivation to behave well is the reward they may get as a result, rather than a sense of pride in their school and a curiosity and love of learning that results in them wanting to do the right thing for themselves. The expectations of adults are sometimes not high enough, and approaches used to address instances of poor behaviour are not consistently well applied.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and the friendly, family atmosphere in the breakfast club provides a cheerful start to the day, as well as a healthy meal. This has a positive impact on attendance which now is broadly average. Although attendance dipped in 2013 due to an outbreak of measles, it is generally improving. The effective work of the parent support advisor is helping to ensure that attendance continues to improve.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils report that they feel very safe. They value highly systems such as 'playground buddies' at break time, and 'peer mediators' over lunchtime. The school council meets regularly to plan school improvements and to raise money for various local and national charities.
- Pupils acknowledge that 'friends and teachers are nice'. They have a good understanding of the different forms of bullying, such as cyber-bullying, and are confident that any rare instances are dealt with swiftly by adults in school. They appreciate the changes that are currently under way to improve the school building and grounds. They recognise that the school has been meticulous in ensuring the safety of everyone while the builders are on site. Pupils' calm yet quick response during an early morning fire alarm clearly shows that pupils are well aware of the school's procedures in the event of a fire.
- The school provides sensitive support for pupils and families whose circumstances might make them vulnerable. Staff work effectively with external agencies to ensure that these families receive all the help they need.
- The school's own recent parental questionnaires show that parents are fully supportive of the school's work in keeping their children safe.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Over time, the leadership team has not ensured that teaching is good enough to enable pupils to achieve well or to reach the levels of attainment that they are capable of, especially in reading. They are yet to ensure that pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning and school are good. However, there is a very clear focus from all leaders at all levels, including governors, on school improvement. A number of recent initiatives are beginning to pay dividends and pupils' progress is now speeding up, especially in mathematics. The headteacher's and senior leaders' determined approaches have helped to establish a highly positive atmosphere in school and a shared ambition among all staff to drive improvements forward rapidly.
- The school's evaluation of what it does well and what it needs to do to improve is accurate. A detailed and well written improvement plan is in place, clearly focused on improving teaching and raising pupils' achievement.
- Following successful strategies to improve teaching and achievement in mathematics, the senior leadership team has rightly introduced a new systematic approach to the teaching of English. The quality of teaching is beginning to improve as a result, but there has been insufficient time for a sustained impact on pupils' achievement.
- The improved contribution of middle leaders, some of which are new to their roles, has strengthened the school's ability to improve. They are now fully involved in reviewing pupils' progress in their subject or area of responsibility. They regularly observe lessons; look at teachers' planning and the quality of work in pupils' books. As a result, they know how well pupils are doing, how well they are taught and what needs to improve.
- Leaders check the quality of teaching in lessons regularly. Their views of its quality are accurate. Staff respond positively to the detailed feedback they receive following observations regarding how their teaching might improve. However, leaders do not always check the progress of the

most-able pupils carefully enough when observing lessons. Furthermore, opportunities to share the good and outstanding teaching practice that currently exists among staff are missed and so some inconsistencies in approaches remain.

- Senior leaders have yet to ensure that all staff share equally high expectations of pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour. Agreed strategies to manage pupils' behaviour are not yet consistently applied by staff across the school.
- The school's curriculum provides a range of interesting activities; it is broad, relevant and effectively promotes pupils' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development. A wide variety of themes are taught, such as Knights and Castles, Land of the Pharaohs, a European Day of Languages and the Second World War. These theme-based approaches are helping to improve pupils' achievement in writing by providing more meaningful, purposeful reasons to write. Good links with local churches, whose ministers regularly conduct school assemblies, contribute well to pupils' spiritual development.
- The views of all pupils are valued, discrimination is not tolerated and the school has endeavoured to ensure that all have equality of opportunity to succeed. This has not yet been completely successful, as pupils' achievement is still uneven across the school.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures fully meet requirements. Record keeping and staff training are fully up to date.
- The school works well with local schools, such as meeting with other teachers to assess pupils' work and agree standards. The local authority brokers training for school staff through the Middlesbrough Schools' Teaching Alliance, but has not taken adequate enough steps to allow the school to maintain its overall effectiveness since its last inspection.
- The school is using the primary school sport funding to allow pupils access to new activities such as dance, table tennis and using a trampoline, as well to promote their involvement in competitive sport, such as by establishing a football team. It uses partnerships well including the Middlesbrough Primary Schools' Sports' Association, and the Sainsbury's Sport kite mark. As a result, pupils are developing more healthy lifestyles and better physical well-being.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Recent changes in the roles of some governors have made better use of members' expertise and skills, and they share the high ambitions of the headteacher and senior staff. They are challenging but supportive, are well informed about the attainment and progress of pupils and the quality of teaching, are very aware of the school's need to improve, especially in reading, and the work that still needs to be done.
 - Governors increasingly hold senior leaders to account. Until recently they had not been rigorous enough in challenging leaders about pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching and pupils' behaviour, but they are now providing more robust challenge.
 - Governors check how the pupil premium funding is spent and what difference it makes to the achievement of eligible pupils. They manage the school's finances well. They are aware of the link between teachers' salary and pupil performance.

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	111633
Local authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	431347

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	328
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Foster
Headteacher	Sue Picknett
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2009
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