

Thorley Hill Primary School

Park Lane, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 3NH

Inspection dates 24–25 April 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	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.

- The school has made considerable improvements in teaching and achievement since the previous inspection.
- Achievement is now good. Children in the Nursery and Reception make a good start and achieve well. Good progress continues in Years 1 and 2. Progress in Years 3 to 6 has improved and is now good, especially in reading and mathematics.
- Attainment by the end of Year 6 was well above average in 2013 and much higher than in previous years.
- Teaching has improved, particularly in Years 3 to 6, and is good overall. There are now regular examples of outstanding practice in a number of classes.
- The school has a positive and welcoming atmosphere where pupils thrive. Pupils show positive attitudes to learning and participate well in the learning activities provided.
- Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. At times, pupils' attitudes, behaviour and their relationships with others are exemplary.
- Procedures to ensure pupils are safe are effective. Pupils feel safe and very well looked after by staff.
- Pupils enjoy the good range of additional activities on offer, such as clubs, educational visits and themed events.
- The headteacher provides ambition, drive and vision in raising pupils' achievement and in improving teaching. She has been the key to the improvements made since the last inspection.
- The headteacher is well supported by the deputy headteacher, other leaders, staff and governors.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- On occasions, teaching does not fully extend to the most-able pupils.
- Pupils' attainment and progress in writing are not as strong as they are in reading and mathematics.
- There are not yet enough opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their writing skills in different subjects.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 17 lessons. Some of these were seen jointly with the headteacher.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, staff, a representative from the local authority, governors and pupils.
- The inspection team took account of 70 responses to the online survey, Parent View.
- Questionnaires from 11 members of staff were analysed.
- The inspectors examined school policies, information about pupils' attainment and progress, teachers' plans, pupils' work, safeguarding procedures and the school's development planning.

Inspection team

Derek Watts, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Clifford Walker

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- Most of the pupils are White British.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is average. The proportion supported through school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- A well below-average proportion of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for pupils in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and other groups.
- The school meets the government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The headteacher has been in post since January 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by making sure that teachers always provide sufficient challenge for the most-able pupils and fully extend their learning.
- Raise pupils' achievement in writing by increasing the opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their writing skills in different subjects.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children's attainment on entry to Nursery varies from year to year. In most years, children enter the school with knowledge, understanding and skills that are broadly typical for their age. They make good progress in Nursery and Reception because of good teaching and the interesting learning activities provided.
- Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 1 and 2 and attainment is consistently above average by the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. In the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2, the school has successfully built upon the good achievement identified in the previous inspection report.
- At the time of the last inspection, pupils' progress in Years 3 to 6 was not good enough and pupils by the end of Year 6 did not reach the standards they were capable of. Decisive and effective action has been taken to raise pupils' achievement in Years 3 to 6. Achievement in Years 3 to 6 is now good.
- Year 6 results in 2013 were well above average in reading, writing and mathematics. These pupils made good progress from their starting points in Year 2, particularly in reading and mathematics. The school's own assessments for pupils currently in Years 3 to 6 show that the high levels of attainment seen last year are being sustained.
- The few pupils supported by the pupil premium usually achieve as well as the other pupils. Good teaching and additional support help ensure that these pupils do well. There were too few pupils eligible for the premium leaving Year 6 in 2013 to make a valid judgement on their attainment in English or mathematics.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because of good teaching and the effective support they receive from learning support assistants.
- In 2013, the proportion of Year 6 pupils who attained the higher levels was above average. However, inspection evidence indicates that, at times, the work set for the school's most-able pupils is not always demanding enough.
- Pupils make good progress in speaking and listening because of the numerous opportunities for them to discuss their learning. They respond well to teachers' questioning and are keen to express opinions and share their ideas.
- Pupils make good progress in reading. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils in Years 1 and 2 make particularly good progress in phonics (letters and the sounds they make). The results of the Year 1 phonics screening check in summer 2013 were well above average. Older pupils apply reading skills well to support their learning.
- Positive steps are being taken by the school to raise pupils' achievement in writing so that it is at least in line with reading and mathematics. Pupils write well for a range of audiences and purposes, and the quality of some of the Year 6 pupils' biographies of famous people or people well known to them is often outstanding. These pupils' writing is well structured into interesting paragraphs and they are able to link dates to specific events and use an anecdotal style. While there are some good examples of pupils applying their writing skills in a range of subjects, writing is an area the school has rightly identified for further improvement as it seeks to make standards as consistently good in writing as they are in other subjects.

- Pupils make good progress in mathematics. They have acquired a good understanding of number and a range of numeracy skills. In a Year 2 lesson, for example, pupils made good progress in gathering and organising data about different coloured sweets in a tube and animals in a zoo. They presented the information clearly in a pictogram.
- Pupils develop healthy lifestyles and physical fitness through physical education lessons and the additional sporting opportunities provided by the sports grant.

The quality of teaching is good

- The school's drive to improve teaching, particularly in Years 3 to 6, has had a positive impact on pupils' attainment and progress. Teaching is now securely good across the school.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and the levels of challenge they offer pupils have been raised since the previous inspection. Teaching successfully engages pupils' interest and promotes their good progress. In all classes, teachers develop positive relationships with the pupils and manage them well.
- In the Nursery and Reception, children are well taught and make good gains in their learning. They receive effective guidance and instruction from adults. They also have good opportunities to begin to explore the possibilities offered by different topics and activities in depth and to develop the ability to find things out for themselves.
- Pupils are taught essential skills well. The teaching of phonics is highly effective and there have been improvements to the teaching of calculation skills. Teachers promote pupils' speaking and listening skills successfully. The teaching of writing has been strengthened but leaders have recognised the need to increase opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills in a range of subjects.
- In the main, teachers use information about pupils' attainment well to plan their teaching and to set challenging work for different groups of pupils. Pupils' interest is sustained and they make good gains in acquiring knowledge, deepening their understanding and applying skills. Occasionally, work is not sufficiently challenging to extend the understanding of the most-able pupils. When this happens, these pupils do not always learn as well as they should.
- There are examples of outstanding teaching. In a highly effective lesson in Year 5, pupils made exceptional progress in writing an alternative ending to a story. They were inspired by an intriguing film extract. Pupils responded very well to the teacher's questioning and explained articulately how the story might unfold. Their writing was imaginative and lively. Pupils made very good progress in reviewing their own and others' writing.
- The teaching of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is effective. The use of learning support assistants has improved since the last inspection and they make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, particularly for those who need additional help with literacy and numeracy.
- The marking of pupils' work has also improved. Teachers provide appropriate levels of encouragement and praise for good work. Teachers' comments are constructive and sufficiently detailed to help pupils to move to the next stages of their learning. Pupils confirm that they find their teachers' marking helpful.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The school has maintained the good behaviour and safety reported in the previous inspection report. Almost all the parents who responded to Parent View stated that their child was safe at school and well looked after. Parents were also positive about the way the school makes sure that pupils are well behaved.
- Children in the Nursery settle quickly into the school's routines. In both the Nursery and Reception, children enjoy their learning and the interesting activities. They relate well to adults and to other children. Good behaviour supports their learning well.
- Inspection evidence and the school's records show that behaviour is good over time. In Years 1 to 6, pupils show a keen interest in their learning. They work well together and participate with enthusiasm in the activities provided. Their positive attitudes to learning and their good behaviour contribute effectively to their good progress. At times, such as in Years 5 and 6, pupils' attitudes and behaviour are exemplary.
- Pupils are courteous, cooperative and show consideration and respect for others. They make good progress in their personal development and thrive in the school's positive and welcoming atmosphere. Pupils show a clear understanding of different cultures and faiths.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. As a result, pupils report that they feel safe at school and very well cared for by staff. Pupils commented, 'Teachers are kind and helpful'. Discussions with pupils show that they have a clear understanding of bullying and its different forms, including name-calling and cyber-bullying. Pupils told the inspectors that bullying was very rare. They were sure that any unpleasant behaviour, including bullying, would be dealt with swiftly by staff.
- Pupils enjoy school and are keen to attend. Attendance levels are consistently above average.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides ambition, determination and vision in improving the school. Since her appointment, she has conveyed high expectations in her drive to raise pupils' achievement and to improve teaching. The headteacher has been the key factor in the school's improvement since the last inspection.
- The deputy headteacher, other leaders, governors and staff share the headteacher's ambitions for the school. There is a positive professional culture among the staff and a clear commitment to making the school even better.
- Through regular and systematic checking, senior leaders and other key leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and improvement areas. They use the findings of self-review well to bring about improvements.
- The role of subject and other leaders has developed well since the previous inspection. Key leaders are fully involved in checking performance and improving their areas of responsibility.
- There has been a relentless drive to improve teaching, particularly in Years 3 to 6. Expectations of what pupils can achieve and pupils' levels of challenge have been raised. Aspects of teaching, such as checking pupils' progress, marking and the teaching of mental mathematics and writing

have all been improved.

- Recent teaching appointments have been successful. New teachers, particularly those who are newly qualified, receive effective mentoring and support. As a result, new teachers are making a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. There are good procedures for appraising the performance of teachers. Training and improvement targets are well linked to pupils' progress and to school's improvement priorities. Good training and support have been provided to increase teacher skills.
- The school provides a good range of subjects and interesting topics for pupils to study. Provision for reading, writing and mathematics have been reviewed and developed. Interesting topics are used to promote the acquisition and use of key learning skills. Pupils thoroughly enjoy the additional activities, such as clubs and educational visits. Themed events including 'Enterprise Week' and 'Creative Arts Week' further enrich the curriculum. The school is well set for the implementation of the new curriculum in September 2014.
- The recently introduced primary school sports grant has been used to extend pupils' sports opportunities. Teachers have received good training from specialist coaches in the areas of gymnastics, basketball and hockey. The grant has also helped to extend the school's participation in local competitions and tournaments.
- The pupil premium funding is used effectively to provide eligible pupils with additional support. One-to-one tuition and other initiatives are having a positive impact on the progress of these pupils.
- The school strives to ensure that all pupils do as well as they can. There are no signs of discrimination and all pupils have full access to the learning activities provided.
- The local authority has provided good support. The School's Improvement Partner has an accurate overview of the school's performance. She provides a good blend of challenge and support. The school have purchased a range of training and support from the local authority. This has had a positive impact on improving teaching and learning.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body are enthusiastic and supportive. They show a clear understanding of pupils' attainment and progress and know how these have improved since the previous inspection. Governors also possess a good knowledge of the quality of teaching in the school. The clear overview that the governors have of the school's performance enables them to raise questions and hold school leaders to account. Governors are familiar with the school's performance management procedures and ensure that promotion and pay awards properly reflect the progress that pupils make. They keep a check on how the pupil premium funding is used and question the impact of the funding on pupils' progress. The governors have attended a range of courses and training to help improve their effectiveness. All safeguarding requirements are met.

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	117230
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	441999

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	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dee Owen
Headteacher	Kim Perez
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2012
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