

Tithe Farm Primary School

Tithe Farm Road, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, LU5 5JB

Inspection dates 6–7 November 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Senior leaders have not responded quickly enough to the decline in standards at the end of Year 2.
- Governors have not checked closely enough on the work of the school or ensured that the school web-site is kept up to date with the required statutory information.
- The quality of teaching is too variable. As a result, the majority of pupils, including children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, are not making good enough progress in developing their reading, writing and mathematical skills. As a result, they are not reaching the standards they are capable of achieving.
- In some classes, teachers' expectations of some pupils, particularly the most able, are too low.
- Teachers do not routinely follow up marking comments and ensure that pupils have acted on their advice.
- Teaching assistants are not always deployed effectively to promote learning.
- Some pupils do not behave well enough or show a positive attitude to learning.
- Some pupils do not attend as often as they should.

The school has the following strengths

- Governors and senior leaders have recognised the school's shortcomings and are now working closely with the local authority and others to improve outcomes for pupils.
- Middle leaders are taking greater responsibility for improving standards and staff have embraced the changes. They are working well together to meet the changing needs as the school moves to become a full primary.
- There are strong signs that the downward trend in the Year 2 outcomes has been halted.
- Disadvantaged pupils, pupils who are disabled and those who have special educational needs are making broadly similar progress to their peers. In some year groups it is better.
- The school ensures that pupils are kept safe.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils’ learning in 13 lessons, two of which were seen together with the headteacher. In addition, the inspectors made a number of other shorter visits to lessons and attended an assembly. They spent time looking at pupils’ books and heard some pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 read.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff, groups of pupils, a local authority representative and a National Leader of Governance.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including the data the school has collected on pupils’ attainment and progress, procedures for keeping pupils safe and the school development plan.
- In making their judgements, inspectors took account of the school’s recent survey of parents’ views, discussions with parents and the 25 questionnaires returned by members of staff. There was only one response to the online parent questionnaire (Parent View).

Inspection team

David Wynford-Jones, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Bradley Murray

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is broadly similar in size to the average primary school.
- The majority of the pupils are of White British heritage. The remaining pupils come from a number of minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Children in the Nursery attend on a part-time basis. Reception aged pupils are admitted on a full time basis the term after their fourth birthday.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language (just over one in ten) is much smaller than average. A few are at the early stages of learning English.
- About four in ten pupils are deemed to be disabled or have special educational needs. This is well-above the national average.
- Over half of all pupils are supported through the pupil premium; this proportion is well-above average. Pupil premium is additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and those who are looked after.
- The school is in the process of a phased expansion from a lower school to a primary school. September 2014 saw the first intake into Year 6.
- The proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school at other than the usual times is much greater than that average.
- The school offers breakfast and after-school clubs for the pupils.
- A National Leader for Governance is working with the governing body.
- The school shares the site with the local authority run Children's Centre and Sure Start Nursery. They were not visited as part of this inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure teaching is consistently good or better by:
 - making sure all pupils make rapid progress in reading and mathematics and especially in writing
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of what all pupils, particularly the most able, can achieve
 - making certain that all teachers consolidate and challenge pupils' understanding
 - checking that pupils respond to advice on how to improve their work
 - deploying teaching assistants effectively at the start and the end of lessons.
- Improve the leadership and management of the school by:
 - ensuring that the governing body implements all the recommendations following the recent review of governance as a matter of urgency
 - senior leaders undertaking more frequent and rigorous checks on the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning
 - updating the school website to ensure that it meets statutory requirements.
- Improve pupils' attendance by following up instances of above average absence rigorously.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Senior leaders have not responded quickly enough to the decline in standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2. They have not undertaken sufficiently rigorous checks on the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning.
- As a result, teaching and pupils' progress is variable. Too many pupils are not making accelerated progress. Although senior leaders have improved pupils' attendance rates slightly, they have not ensured that all pupils attend as often as they should.
- Leaders appreciate the importance of equality of opportunity but have not implemented this in practice. Some groups of pupils are not making as much progress as others.
- The governing body has not monitored the work of the school closely enough to hold leaders to account for the improvements needed. Some statutory requirements are not being met, for example, there are many omissions on the school website. The action plan, following the review of governance, has not been implemented with sufficient urgency.
- The weaknesses in senior leadership and governance have been recognised. Senior leaders and governors are committed to working closely with the local authority and others to improve provision and outcomes for pupils. There is evidence to show that the school has turned the corner. Although leadership at all levels is improving, it is not yet good. Systems to ensure teaching is consistently good or better and that all pupils make rapid progress are not firmly embedded.
- The headteacher is encouraging the middle leaders to develop their roles. Most have only recently assumed their leadership responsibilities but already have a good understanding of what needs to be done to bring about improvements. They have contributed to the evaluation of the school's performance and have accurately identified the school's strengths and any weaknesses. The key areas for development are correctly identified and set out in the school development plan.
- The headteacher analyses pupils' attainment and progress information and now has regular meetings with teachers to review pupils' progress. Teachers are asked to explain if any pupil is not making the expected rate of progress and what the teacher intends to do about it. Consequently, the quality of teaching is improving.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well – for example, through educational visits and celebrating festivals from different countries and religions. In addition to sharing experiences with pupils from the many minority ethnic and cultural backgrounds, pupils' cultural development and creativity are enhanced through art and music. Pupils are gaining a good understanding of right and wrong and of the importance of taking responsibility within the community. As a result they are developing an understanding of British values and democracy.
- Staff are working well together to implement the changes required by the revised National Curriculum and to take account of the changes needed since becoming a primary school. In all classes, leaders now ensure that there is an appropriate emphasis on literacy and numeracy. Updated procedures for assessing and recording pupils' attainment and progress against new curricular requirements are in the process of being developed.
- The additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is being used well to narrow any gaps between eligible pupils' achievement and that of others. Sports funding is used to promote swimming, employ specialist sports staff and to train teachers. Activities are having the beneficial impact intended on pupils' physical fitness and well-being. Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision is helping the children to gain in physical and emotional well-being. Staff are in the process of revising their planning and approach to delivering the curriculum.
- The local authority has recently provided senior leaders and governors with good support. Officers have

undertaken a review of the school's performance and now visit the school more often.

■ The governance of the school:

- Following an external audit of governance in May 2014, governors are now aware of their shortcomings and are working with a National Leader for Governance to improve their skills. An action plan has been drawn up and several governors have been recruited to broaden the range of expertise on the governing body. As a result, the governors are now questioning senior leaders in greater depth about the school's performance, the quality of teaching and the outcomes for pupils.
- Key governors know how targets are set for teachers to improve, and understand the process for rewarding good teaching. Some have a good understanding of pupils' performance data and are able to compare the outcomes with local and national comparisons. Arrangements have been made for all governors to be trained in interpreting performance data.
- Governors are keen to promote good relationships within the school and the local community and will not accept discrimination of any sort. They ensure that procedures for keeping pupils safe are followed. Several governors have recent training on the recruitment of staff and child protection.
- The school's finances are monitored appropriately. Governors make sure the primary sports funding and pupil premium allocation are spent as intended and are having a positive impact on pupils' progress. However, governors have not ensured that the school website has been kept up to date with required information on the impact of the additional funding or that the website has sufficient information about the curriculum.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Too many pupils do not have a positive attitude towards learning or work with sustained concentration. Occasionally, the behaviour of a minority of pupils is inappropriate and this sometimes disrupts other pupils' learning.
- Although pupils' attendance rates and punctuality have improved, there is still a core of pupils who do not attend as often as they should. Overall, attendance is now broadly average for primary schools.
- Incidents of inappropriate behaviour are becoming less frequent as pupils' behaviour and attitude to work gets better. Teachers are beginning to capitalise on the more positive attitudes to learning displayed by children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Most pupils get on well together during lunchtimes and play sensibly on the playground. Pupils show respect for the school environment. Displays and equipment are treated with respect. There is no litter.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. There is a strong emphasis on pupils' safety from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards. Leaders make sure the building is secure, staff are checked for their suitability prior to appointment and safety guidelines are followed.
- Pupils feel safe in school and understand different types of bullying, for example name-calling, homophobia, fighting, racial bullying, or religious intolerance. They say that such behaviour does occur occasionally but they know who to turn to and that it would be dealt with fairly and swiftly.
- Pupils appreciate and enjoy attending the breakfast and after-school clubs. They say it gives them a sense of security and a good opportunity to meet with their friends.
- Pupils have a reasonable understanding of how to keep themselves safe. However, some older pupils are not sufficiently aware of dangers when using the internet.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Some teachers' expectations of what pupils, particularly the most able, can achieve are not high enough.

They do not plan work that is just right for pupils working at different levels and do not check on pupils' understanding or challenge their thinking.

- Some pupils find the work too easy, especially when earlier work is unnecessarily repeated. As a result, pupils lose interest and do not make rapid progress. In some lessons, teaching assistants are not deployed effectively at the start and end of lessons. They sit passively and are not involved in supporting or extending pupils' learning.
- Most teachers manage pupils' behaviour well and encourage them to share their ideas with each other and with the adults. This practice effectively promotes pupils' social skills and their ability to communicate clearly and to respect each other.
- Not all teachers promote pupils' reading, writing and numerical skills adequately. Although pupils' work in their English and mathematics books is marked regularly and they are given clear guidance on what to do to improve their work, teachers do not routinely follow up the comments to ensure that pupils have acted on the advice.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language are given support to enable them to feel included and make reasonable progress. Teachers provide additional support for pupils who find learning difficult and ensure they make at least similar progress to their peers.
- Staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage work well together. They ensure that children settle quickly and learn in a safe environment.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Standards at the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics have declined steadily over the last three years from exceptionally high in 2012 to broadly average in 2014. Pupils' progress in the different year groups in Key Stage 2 is inconsistent. Based on their end of Year 2 assessments, too few pupils, especially the most able, are making more than the expected rate of progress.
- School assessment records, confirmed by inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work, suggest that the downward trend at the end of Year 2 has been reversed and that all groups of pupils are on track to reach higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics than those achieved in 2014. The end of Year 5 assessments and work in the Year 6 pupils' books suggest they are on track to reach the nationally expected levels by the end of the year. This represents broadly average progress for all groups in Key Stage 2.
- Many of the more-able pupils have not made good enough progress because some teachers' expectations are not high enough. Older, more-able readers can read with expression and good pace but feel hindered by the school's approach to following a reading scheme so not giving them a free choice on their reading material. When writing, they understand the advantages of turning to a thesaurus to extend their vocabulary, but these are seldom immediately available. In mathematics lessons, they use mathematical terminology correctly to explain their thinking but some teachers do not extend the pupils' thinking by asking follow up questions often enough.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make broadly similar progress to that of their classmates; in some classes it is better. In these classes, teachers and teaching assistants frequently check on the progress of each individual and provide help when needed to enable them to make progress. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make similar progress to their peers.
- In 2014, Year 2 disadvantaged pupils eligible for pupil premium funding reached broadly similar standards to those of their classmates. These pupils were about half a term behind their classmates in reading, writing and mathematics. The gap was slightly wider in writing. Compared to all pupils nationally, the gap was similar but slightly wider in reading.
- There is no Year 6 data for 2014 as this is the first year for the school to have Year 6 pupils. School data

show that the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates in Years 4 and 5 is about six months, with the gap being slightly wider in writing. Progress data, based on the end of Year 2 assessments, suggest that disadvantaged pupils are making slightly better progress than their peers and the gap is closing.

- From their various starting points, children make expected progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. In 2014, the proportion of pupils reaching a good level of development in all areas by the time they enter Year 1 is in line with national results. This is a marked improvement on the 2013 outcomes.
- In the 2012 and 2014 Year 1 phonics (the sounds that letters make) checks, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard was above the national average. In 2013 outcomes were below average.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how sporting activities contribute to healthy living. The appropriate use of the primary school sports funding has ensured that pupils enjoy the activities but as yet not all staff are more confident in teaching a range of sports.

The early years provision

requires improvement

- Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage requires improvement because teaching and systems, for example recording assessment information, to support children's learning are not yet good enough to ensure that all children make rapid progress in developing their skills.
- Teachers' expectations of what children can achieve are not high enough and activities are not sufficiently challenging to develop the children's mathematical and communication and language skills. However, the Early Years team is working successfully with an external consultant to improve outcomes for children.
- The approach to planning and delivering learning opportunities for children has been reviewed and improvements are being implemented. There is a good emphasis on developing children's social skills and ensuring they are happy in school. Teachers and other adults act as positive role models and effectively promote children's health, safety and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Procedures for keeping children safe are well established. Regular checks are undertaken to make certain that equipment is safe.
- Relationships with adults are good. Nursery-aged children settle quickly and enjoy the various activities in the spacious classrooms and outdoor areas. The potential of the outdoor area to promote children's learning has not been maximised.
- Nearly all of the children who attend the Nursery move into the Reception class where they are joined by a significant number of other children, most of whom have attended other settings. Children's skills on entry to the Reception class are very varied. The skills of the majority are broadly typical for their age.
- By the end of the Reception Year, children's skills and knowledge are close to what is expected of a typical 5-year old, and they are suitably prepared for Year 1. The attainment of the children on entry to Year 1 in 2014 was higher than that in 2013.

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	109585
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	448397

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	240
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Goodchild
Headteacher	Shelah Surgey
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2010
Telephone number	01582 865047
Fax number	01582 865057
Email address	tithefarm@cbc.beds.sch.uk

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