

Thomas Gray Primary School

Chestnut Grove, Bootle, Merseyside, L20 4LX

Inspection dates 10–11 March 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher provides very strong leadership. She has led the school very well to overcome significant turmoil in staffing. The situation is now more stable. Teaching and achievement have improved this year and are now good as the result of effective action.
- Pupils make good progress from individual starting points and attainment is average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Despite staff absences in the early years, provision continues to be good overall. Staff are very sensitive to the needs of the children. Those who need extra pastoral support benefit from attending the nurture room in the afternoon.
- The needs of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are identified promptly. Support is effective and pupils make good progress.
- Teaching is good. Those new to the profession are supported well and guidance provided if needed. Tasks often enthuse and excite pupils who enjoy learning.
- The curriculum is rich. Visits are used extremely well to extend pupils' horizons and enhance their skills. Art on display is of a very high quality.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very successfully across the curriculum. The focus is on learning to reflect and take responsibility for your actions. As a result, pupils work together happily, with many examples of respect for others and value of different cultures.
- Pupils feel safe because of the warm and effective care provided by staff. Behaviour is good. At play, pupils are energetic and use the equipment well to make up games with their friends.
- Governors share the united determination that the school will improve. They supported the headteacher well during difficult times. Their involvement in school has extended and governors are well informed about teaching and pupils' progress. They ask leaders probing questions to check on the impact of changes.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Staff, including teaching assistants, do not always correct pupils' misunderstandings as they work and this slows their learning.
- Spelling is not as strong as other aspects of writing.
- In the early years, attainment in writing is below that in other aspects.
- Subject leaders are starting to collect information about teaching and pupils' progress. Other than in English and mathematics, this information is not used well to identify priorities.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all classes and in small groups. They held discussions with staff, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and with pupils.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work with a focus on early years, writing and mathematics. The work and progress of pupils in Year 6 were given detailed attention as these pupils were absent in London during the inspection. Pupils read to the inspectors.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents including the school's improvement plan, subject action plans, the checks made on pupils' progress, the minutes of meetings held by the governing body and information about safeguarding.
- Inspectors took account of the 10 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and results of the school's own parent questionnaire. They also spoke to parents as they dropped their children off at school.
- Twenty-three responses to the staff questionnaire were analysed.

Inspection team

Jennifer Platt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Stewart Plowes

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is slightly smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and eligible for support through the pupil premium is much higher than the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding the school receives for those who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- Children attend the Nursery on a part-time basis and the Reception class full time.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below the national average and very few speak English as an additional language.
- Occasionally, as the need arises, pupils attend alternative provision at the Jigsaw Primary Pupil Referral Unit.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress at the end of Year 6.
- There have been several new staff appointments since the previous inspection.
- The school has achieved several national awards, including Artsmark, Investors in Pupils and the Leading Parent Partnership Award.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching even further and increase pupils' progress by:
 - ensuring that teachers and teaching assistants check that pupils understand the tasks they are set and remedy any errors and misunderstandings as they learn
 - improving pupils' spelling and ensuring that consistent mistakes are highlighted and pupils given time to correct them
 - improving children's skills in writing in the early years.
- Improve the role of subject leaders, other than those leading English and mathematics, by:
 - extending their opportunities to check on teaching and pupils' progress
 - ensuring that this information is used when drawing up plans to lead their subjects forward.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has been tireless in her efforts to overcome significant challenges since the previous inspection. Her exemplary leadership has led to raised morale and 100% support from staff, plus a school that has a rising intake and the confidence of parents.
- All leaders and staff are involved in deciding what is working well and which aspects to improve. This leads to an accurate understanding of the way ahead and support for change. Actions are in place to improve weaker aspects, although the impact of some of these, especially in writing, has not been as fast as the leaders would have liked because of the many changes in staff. Nevertheless, the school is well placed to improve.
- Improvements to assessment ensure that pupils needing help are identified and support put in place. This was the case last year and extra help was provided for this cohort, although for some newcomers it was too late to ensure good progress. Effective leadership is reflected in the school's new systems to assess pupils' progress in line with national changes to assessment procedures.
- Senior leaders and other external consultants monitor teaching closely. Work is checked on and informal walks around school give them an informed view of what is working well and how teachers can be supported. This is especially beneficial for the staff who are new to the profession. Training is provided where it is needed, especially in implementing new changes to teaching mathematics, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Some aspects remain to be improved but overall teaching is improving.
- School leaders keep a close check on the progress, attendance and behaviour of pupils attending the alternative provision.
- Teachers have targets based on information about their performance and the progress pupils make in their class. Regular meetings between teachers and leaders review progress. Teachers attend these meetings prepared fully to identify actions for pupils who are not making fast enough progress. Increases in salary are linked to performance and the achievement of targets.
- Staff changes have delayed the development of the role of subject leaders. A few are new to the role, while others are on unavoidable absence. The leadership of English and mathematics is effective overall with the support of the senior leadership. These leaders make good use of data on progress to identify priorities. For example, the adjustments to the teaching of phonics (letters and their sounds) have been prompt and effective in Key Stage 1. Although there are examples of improvements, for example in the teaching and quality of art, the overall leadership of other subjects is not fully effective. The role of subject leaders in checking on teaching and pupils' progress is not developed enough to provide them with the information to identify precise priorities for their subjects.
- Staff rise to the challenge to extend the horizons of the pupils. The curriculum is rich and exciting. Visits are used extremely successfully to inspire pupils and lead to examples of high quality work, including the use of skills across subjects. For example, models were made as part of the topic on rain forests and letters written recalling a visit to Chester Zoo. The combination of specialist teachers raises pupils' experiences of art and physical education effectively.
- The focus on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very strong. Pupils have work books showing discrete lessons giving attention to relationships and feelings, as well as their health and safety. Older pupils recalled an amazing amount of information about Islam and the history of this faith. Discussions show they value other cultures in the school.
- Learning about British values is evident throughout the school. The memorial in the hall is a poignant reminder of boys from the school who died in the Great War. Poetry is sad and reflective. This is balanced with the richness of today's world. Older pupils on their visit to London attended the theatre as well as learning about the purpose of government as they visited the Houses of Parliament. Pupils in Year 6 are very proud that they have been selected to perform *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Everyman Theatre in Liverpool.
- The pupil premium is spent prudently. Additional staffing enables pupils to be taught in small groups, as well as some one-to-one tutor sessions for daily reading. A counsellor is available weekly for pupils needing skilled guidance. The nurture room is available for children in the early years who need extra help with social and personal skills. Visits to raise pupils' experiences and confidence are subsidised, if needed. The balance of spending between social and academic needs is very effective in ensuring that these pupils are fully involved in all aspects of school life. This reflects the very effective promotion of equality of opportunity that fosters good relations and tackles discrimination, as well as ensuring that all make equal progress.
- When it is identified that a pupil would benefit from attending alternative provision, leaders check closely

on their attendance and behaviour. Most placements are for a short period and on a part-time basis, so staff can evaluate the impact of the provision on pupils' progress and behaviour.

- Effective use is made of the primary school physical education and sport funding. The employment of a sports coach to work across school has increased pupils' opportunities and skills. Teachers' confidence is higher as they observe and pick up new ideas. Staff identify improvement in their weaker skills of teaching gymnastics and dance, based on training provided. The results of a pupil questionnaire reveal the positive impact of this spending. More now attend a sports club, 72% of older pupils take part in an inter-school competition, and 99% think there is a good choice of sports and activities.
- The local authority provides effective support. Advice has been invaluable to the headteacher and governors as they have made some difficult decisions about staffing. Training is provided by the Strand Network and is especially useful for the staff new to the profession. Moderation of standards has provided reassurance to staff in the accuracy of their assessments.
- Close attention is given to keeping pupils safe. Vetting procedures are secure for staff working in school and training on safeguarding is provided for all. Safeguarding requirements are met and effective.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is effective. Governors are very aware of and have played a significant role in resolving some difficult situations in school. New recruits have ensured a full governing body and extended the range of skills available. These are put to full use to support leaders and pupils. Governors are aware of the quality of teaching through information provided by the headteacher and some visits, although these are not as often as they would like because of work commitments. However, the role of 'buddy governor' links governors to a class and they attend special events.
 - Governors support the headteacher's high expectations of the quality of teaching and play a part in actions when these are not met. Data on progress are reviewed and questions asked as, for example, the reasons for the dip in 2014. They are aware of changes put in place, especially in the teaching of mathematics, and they check on current progress.
 - Governors manage the budget efficiently. They check that salary rewards are given only when targets are met and know that additional funding benefits the needs of pupils.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils behave well in lessons and at play. They appreciate the amount of space outdoors and make full use of hoops and skipping ropes. Games are energetic but friendly and pupils relate well to one another.
- Pupils report that at times their learning is disrupted by other pupils and know that this is often by pupils who have difficulties in sustaining good behaviour. Overall, this is managed well and pupils respect the use of colour-coded cards, knowing that a red card is the ultimate warning if they misbehave. Pupils who attend the alternative provision make good gains in managing their behaviour.
- Most pupils show positive attitudes to their work in lessons. There is usually a good show of hands to answer questions. For the most part, pupils give full attention to adults and get on with their tasks, but this level of interest wanes for some if they are not fully interested in the activity or an adult is not prompting them to complete their work.
- Pupils understand their role in society and have been involved in calculating how the school spends the budget and the importance of conserving energy. They have a growing understanding of what they can do to improve the environment and support others by raising funds for charities.
- Discussions with pupils identified that they are happy and enjoy coming to school. In response to the school's many efforts to involve parents and reward pupils, attendance has improved and is now broadly average.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say they feel safe and value the checks made in school to keep them secure. Pupils who met the inspectors recalled important messages from visitors about avoiding dangers in and out of school. They understand the potential hazards of fireworks, road safety and strangers. Training about e-safety has been effective and pupils know how to keep safe using the internet.
- Pupils recognise how their actions can upset others and try to respond to the many reminders about being kind and respectful. The imaginative system to collect all their positive actions in a 'bucket' helps them to

remember the importance of how they act on a daily basis.

- Bullying in all its forms is recognised by pupils who confirm it happens rarely in the school. They recognise that some pupils upset others by calling them names, but this is usually resolved quickly. Older pupils are very aware of the dangers of cyber bullying and how to avoid this. They consider racist and homophobic comments are not a problem in the school. Older pupils feel well prepared for the next stage in their education and also in their understanding of British values of respect and equality.
- The pupils who met the inspectors identified little they would improve. They collaborated on a quotation to describe their school: 'This is a happy school because lessons are amazing, we get spoilt by the staff who do a lot for us, and we have lots of kind friends.'

The quality of teaching

is good

- Although staffing has changed and some changes are ongoing, the stability currently in the school is leading to consistency in the good quality of teaching. A review of pupils' work and the school's data on progress indicate that teaching overall is effective across subjects and years.
- Tasks are often imaginative and allow discussion and collaboration. A variety of methods sustain learning and demonstrate teachers' good understanding of how pupils learn. In Year 5, pupils enjoyed a short game to group homonyms together, which clarified any misunderstanding very effectively. They quickly identified 'cereal' and 'serial' which had puzzled them before the task. The interest of this class was also captured when they watched a video of life in Baghdad and the origin of Islam. The task to write a letter describing their imaginary visit to Baghdad is just one example of how teachers extend pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across other subjects skilfully.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, based on careful preparation. As a result, questions are probing and pupils know that they are expected to answer in full and explain their ideas.
- Staff have risen to the challenge to apply a new assessment system and are using the information effectively to target work at the correct level for pupils. This is very evident in the challenge provided for the most able, especially in Key Stage 2, with an increase in pupils reaching the higher levels.
- The teaching of English and mathematics has improved with the adoption of several new approaches. These are providing structure to lessons and enabling teaching assistants to play a full part in teaching the basic skills of these subjects. Pupils are grouped according to ability and there is flexibility for pupils to move between years, if it is felt the work is more suitable to their needs. At times, staff follow the structure of the sessions too rigidly and move on without ensuring that pupils have fully understood or that mistakes are not corrected. This leads to some confusion for pupils and hampers their progress. However, this is not always the case and teachers often identify concerns and stop pupils to provide additional input.
- The teaching of mathematics has improved in response to additional sessions to extend pupils' confidence in carrying out calculations and solving problems. These sessions are often practical for younger pupils as, for example, when using bricks to build towers as they learn about size. Teachers use mathematical terms successfully, as in Year 2 when the most able talked confidently about the inverse of numbers.
- Reading is taught effectively. An overhaul of the teaching of phonics (letters and their sounds) has been effective. Smaller groups and a focus on key words, as well as more practical activities, have raised attainment. To encourage more enthusiasm for reading, older pupils have time for sharing a complete novel. Questions are asked to encourage inference and understanding, which are skills that some find more difficult. An outcome of reading together in class is pupils' real love of books. Older pupils enjoy ordering books at the local library and have favourite authors.
- Pupils struggle to write imaginatively and teachers improve this by providing more interesting topics and using visits as a focus for writing. The teaching of grammar, punctuation and spelling has improved and these skills are taught effectively as a separate subject. Spelling remains the weaker aspect, despite these efforts.
- Marking has improved since the previous inspection, but the change of staff means that the school guidance to inform pupils how to improve is not always evident. The best practice is excellent and pupils respond well to comments. The correcting of spelling mistakes is not always ensuring that pupils take note of their errors and practise how to spell them correctly next time.

The achievement of pupils is good

- The results of national tests at the end of Year 6 have been rising gradually and in 2013 were moving to above average in reading, writing and mathematics. The dip in 2014 was expected by the school, despite their endeavours to provide as well as they could for the pupils.
- The school welcomes newcomers, many of whom have found it difficult to settle in other schools and also those new to the country who speak no English. In 2014, the Year 6 group included several pupils who joined the school in Years 5 and 6. This, plus staffing difficulties, led to a dip to below average in mathematics, reading and the skills of grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Leaders accepted that the make-up of the year group and staffing changes contributed to some extent to the dip, but were not complacent about examining their own practice. Changes made to the curriculum and the focus on grammar, punctuation, spelling and mathematics have been effective. A review of pupils' books, as well as records of their progress, show current standards in Year 6 are average in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress in Key Stage 2 is good, increasing as pupils move to Years 5 and 6.
- Progress from individual starting points in Key Stage 1 is good. Test results at the end of Key Stage 1 have continued to improve year-on-year since 2012. Attainment is now securely in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The results of the national screening test in phonics in Year 1 were below average and pupils of all abilities did not reach the expected level. Swift identification of weaker skills and changes to teaching have been effective. Early indications are that attainment is closer to average. Certainly, when listening to pupils read, the inspectors found they make good use of these skills to tackle unknown words, but also have a bank of key words to help them along. Older pupils still rely on these skills for some words which they are unsure of, but many read confidently. Some struggle with words that are new to them, but their skills of understanding a text are improving with a focus on sharing books.
- Mathematics has been a priority for the school, with a focus on increasing pupils' ability to reason and apply their skills. Extra sessions are enhancing these skills, although some pupils still have a way to go to be fully secure in explaining their calculations.
- Although writing has improved along with grammar and punctuation, it remains a priority for the school. Many write with more imagination and in Year 6 are working towards a very high level. Others struggle to be as imaginative, although they present their work well and clearly recognise different styles of writing, such as letters and instructions. Spelling remains an aspect that is slow to improve. Pupils do not always review their work and spot their mistakes.
- The most-able pupils make good progress. This is especially the case for the older pupils where the work is challenging. Currently there is an increase in the proportion of pupils on track to reach above average levels, including the high Level 6.
- The very few pupils who at times attend alternative provision make good progress. Their behaviour, attendance and attitudes to learning improve, making them more successful pupils when they return to this school.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs flourish in this friendly school. Staff are welcoming and positive and help them to overcome their barriers to learning. Their needs are fully met, often with additional support in a group and at times on a one-to-one basis. They make good progress socially as well as academically.
- Disadvantaged pupils make up a large proportion of pupils in the school. In 2013, there was no gap between their attainment and that of other pupils in the school or other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. The gap was wider for Year 6 pupils in 2014. Test results showed that on average disadvantaged pupils were behind others in the school by just over two terms in mathematics and by broadly half a term in reading and writing. When compared to other pupils nationally, the gap was wider, as it was for all pupils in the school. Disadvantaged pupils were behind others nationally by five and a half terms in mathematics, four terms in reading and just over one term in writing. The circumstances around the attainment of this year group need to be taken into account when considering these figures.
- As attainment has risen for other pupils in school, so it has improved for disadvantaged pupils. They now make at least good progress, with examples of better progress for older pupils where the impact of the pupil premium is reaping rewards. The current gap between their attainment and others has narrowed considerably and is negligible in all subjects.
- Attainment in other subjects is evident across the school. Imaginative art and models, amazing photographs using digital cameras, and pupils' confidence to achieve reflect the school's many strengths.

The early years provision is good

- Children start school with attainment that is lower than what is typical for their age, especially in communication and language. Some enter Nursery with limited skills in personal hygiene and social skills. A warm welcome awaits the children and they settle quickly and follow the daily routines with growing confidence. They make good progress, with an increase in the proportion reaching the level expected for their age but overall children have a way to go, especially in their writing skills, to be fully prepared for Year 1. The year group in 2014 had more boys than girls and attainment of the boys was lower than for the girls. Topics have been adjusted to ensure that boys are interested in their activities.
- Effective teaching focuses on extending children's experiences and confidence to try out new ideas. Questions are used effectively to extend vocabulary. During the inspection, children were learning about *Jack and the Beanstalk* and planted their own seeds. Outdoors, the site supervisor shares his gardening skills as children prepare the soil and then plant potatoes. Children in Reception use bricks to build towers and explain which is the tallest. Challenge is evident when the most able work out by how many bricks one is taller than another and start to apply their number skills.
- Children make good progress in mark-making and most write their name unaided. Many start to attempt simple words and the most able write short sentences. Others, however, are less confident in developing their skills. Books show that at times letters are incorrectly formed or difficult to read. When children are working, this is not always rectified by staff.
- Role play is used most effectively as children take on roles in the house, feeding the baby and cleaning. The resources are very realistic and invite play and interaction. The outdoor space is used well, including the opportunity to play in the mud kitchen. There are opportunities for children to work unaided and at other times be involved in a group with an adult. At times, the boys require more attention to ensure that they are involved in activities that will extend their learning.
- The atmosphere in the early years is warm and friendly. Safeguarding procedures are secure. Children say they feel safe and know who they would go to if they had a worry. Behaviour is good and children follow the routines, share resources and give good attention to staff when they are being taught in small groups.
- The new leader, supported by the headteacher, provides effective leadership. Jointly, they have established priorities to improve attainment. The teaching of phonics has been adjusted, with further deployment of staff so that groups are smaller. Assessment is used effectively so that children needing extra help are identified and supported well. Children with limited social skills benefit from attending the nurture room in the afternoon. They follow a programme of enjoyable activities in a small relaxed ethos that encourages them to relax, communicate confidently with others and grow in self-esteem.

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	134785
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	456184

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	233
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Phil Gretton
Headteacher	Rachael Rimmer
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2012
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