

Thorplands Primary School

Farm Field Court, Thorplands, Northampton, NN3 8AQ

Inspection dates 17–18 March 2015

| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Not previously inspected | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| | This inspection: | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Leadership and management | | Good | 2 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | | Good | 2 |
| Quality of teaching | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Achievement of pupils | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Early years provision | | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- There are still too many inconsistencies in teaching to ensure that all pupils make rapid progress, and so make up the considerable gaps in their achievement from their previous education.
- Some teachers do not always give all groups in the class sufficiently demanding activities. This means that their progress is not always good enough.
- The academy's work to improve pupils' writing, handwriting, spelling and mental arithmetic, while successful, has not yet eliminated all the weaknesses in these areas.
- In some lessons, teachers do not check frequently enough on the progress of all groups. This means they do not always quickly identify and help pupils who are confused, or challenge others to refine their work.

The school has the following strengths

- Strong leadership from the headteachers, trustees, governors and other leaders has greatly improved teaching and raised achievement since the academy opened. Improvements continue to be rapid.
- Despite the many recent changes in staffing, the co-headteachers have developed an effective team who are supporting each other well in improving all aspects of education in the academy.
- Teachers manage classes well, and give pupils interesting activities that hold their interest and develop their enthusiasm.
- Better provision in the early years means Reception children make good progress, and greatly enjoy school.
- Good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning from pupils across the academy, and much higher levels of attendance, strongly support their improving progress.
- The academy is meticulous about keeping pupils safe, and pupils feel secure and happy there as a result.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress because the academy is extremely careful to meet their individual needs.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed substantial parts of 11 lessons. They also made briefer visits to several lessons to observe how well disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs were helped to succeed. They made many of these observations jointly with one or other of the headteachers.
- Inspectors observed pupils in assemblies, at break times, and in breakfast club. They heard several pupils read in Year 1 and in Year 6. The team met formally with groups of pupils from Years 3, 5 and 6 and inspectors spoke informally with many others.
- The team examined a variety of documentation, including the academy’s records of pupils’ progress, information about keeping pupils safe, records about the quality of teaching, and the academy’s evaluation of its own effectiveness.
- There were only four responses to the online survey, Parent View, so inspectors did not have access to this information. The team took account of the results of 79 replies to the academy’s own survey of parental opinion from the end of the last school year. Inspectors also considered 18 replies to a questionnaire for staff.
- Inspectors discussed the academy’s work with members of staff and with representatives of the academy trust and several governors.
- Samples of pupils’ work were examined in books and on display.

Inspection team

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Steven Hill, Lead inspector | Additional Inspector |
| Patrick Amieli | Additional Inspector |
| Carol Worthington | Additional Inspector |

Full report

Information about this school

- Thorplands Primary School became an academy on 1 April 2013. It is part of a multi-academy trust, The Education Fellowship. Responsibility for the governance of the academy lies with the Fellowship, but it delegates much of the day-to-day responsibility to an academic advisory board, whose members are referred to as governors. Governors work in close collaboration with the officers of the fellowship to provide governance to the academy.
- The academy has two co-headteachers, who share the responsibilities of headship.
- The academy is smaller than the average primary school.
- There have been considerable changes to teaching staff since the academy opened.
- About half the pupils are White British, with the remainder coming from a variety of different minority ethnic groups. An above-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- Reception children attend the academy on a full-time basis.
- A well-above-average proportion of pupils is disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium. The pupil premium is extra government funding to help the education of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, or who have been eligible in the past, and for children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- The academy has a specially resourced provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. The unit provides for pupils who have speech, language and associated difficulties. The provision has the capacity to cater for up to seven pupils on a full time basis, aged from 4 to 11. These pupils are fully integrated into the mainstream classes. Currently, four pupils are supported by the unit.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- There is a children's centre on the same site, which is managed and inspected separately. The trust and the academic advisory board manage a child-care provision on the site, Thorplands Nursery. This is registered independently with Ofsted, so is inspected and reported upon separately. The academy runs a breakfast club for 80 of its own pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to be consistently good, and so raise achievement, particularly by:
 - making sure that tasks are suitably challenging for all groups of pupils, without being too difficult
 - consolidating the improvements made in pupils' skills in writing, handwriting, spelling and mental calculations, to eliminate the remaining gaps in their achievement
 - always checking on the progress of different groups during lessons, so that the successful are challenged to improve, and those who are struggling can be given help promptly.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The co-headteachers, working closely with the trust and governors, have established a culture in the academy where everyone's efforts are directed to improving pupils' achievement and personal development. This has led to major improvements in the quality of teaching, despite significant changes in staffing, and the relative inexperience of several staff. However, some inconsistencies remain in teaching which mean that achievement, while rising quickly as the result of better teaching, still requires improvement.
- In parallel to improvements in teaching, work to ensure better behaviour and attendance has been extremely successful. Good behaviour throughout the academy, positive attitudes to learning and above-average attendance are all contributing to better achievement.
- Leaders manage teaching well. They collect a variety of information about teachers' performance, including observing their lessons, sampling the work in their classes, and checking their planning. Leaders give teachers clear advice about how to improve, set targets for action, and review these regularly. Managers ensure that extra training is provided where needed, to help teachers meet their targets.
- Senior staff have ensured that middle leaders, such as those who take responsibility for subjects, or different key stages, play a full part in making improvements. They have good systems to check on what is happening in their areas of responsibility, and take decisive action to address any shortcomings which they identify. Strong leadership from the inclusion manager is ensuring that different groups receive the support they need. The specially resourced provision is led well. Good leadership of the early years has improved provision in the Reception class, and children there are making good progress. Good leadership of physical education is supporting increased participation rates and is raising standards.
- Weaknesses in pupils' skills in writing, spelling, handwriting and mental arithmetic have been identified, often because of gaps in their learning from earlier in their education. The staff have worked together effectively this year, with common approaches to remedy this. However, leaders have rightly identified that there is still need to consolidate this work, to make sure that remaining shortcomings in pupils' achievement are eliminated.
- Pupil premium money is spent effectively. It is targeted very specifically to address the needs of groups and individuals, both socially and academically. Efforts spent on improving attendance for these pupils have been exceptionally successful, raising attendance to be above average from previously low levels. Money is spent to help eligible pupils to take a full part in academy life, such as learning a musical instrument, attending breakfast club, or joining in trips and visits. Staff provide carefully planned support to help particular individuals achieve better, and evaluate their effectiveness, modifying the approach if need be. All this ensures that disadvantaged pupils make the same progress as their classmates. However, like that of their classmates, their progress requires improvement, although it is improving.
- The way the academy spends pupil premium money parallels the way that it uses its resources to ensure that all groups have equal opportunities to participate in academy life and to achieve. Leaders and other teachers keep a careful track on pupils' achievements through regular assessments. They check on the progress of groups and individuals and put in place extra help to any who need it. The impact of such interventions is monitored, and the help is adjusted to make the most of its effectiveness. This approach particularly benefits those pupils who are supported by the specially resourced provision. They are fully integrated in the mainstream classes, taking a full part in all activities, and given good support to help their learning.
- The primary physical education and sport premium is spent very effectively. Most of the funding is used towards the salary of a specialist teacher, who works with all the pupils in the academy. This is resulting in good achievement during physical education lessons. The teacher also organises teams for a wide variety of inter-school sports, such as the cross-country competition on the last day of this inspection, and provides a wide range of physical activities at lunch times. The work has resulted in increases in pupils' participation, enthusiasm and skills. Other spending on equipment supports this positive picture.

- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. Pupils learn British values through the academy's core values of respect, responsibility, courage, curiosity and perseverance. Pupils are well aware of these and can explain their importance and the relevance to their own lives. Staff continually reinforce and explain these values, for example during an assembly for younger children about the explorer Scott of the Antarctic. Pupils learn about different religions, and they value others' cultures and their views. They know that the academy will not tolerate discrimination, and that staff will tackle any unfairness that arises. They learn about democracy, for example through the chance to have their views represented by the pupil forum. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The curriculum is wide-ranging. It is fully engaging pupils' interest, contributing well to their improved attendance and their better achievement. There are good opportunities for pupils to learn a musical instrument, for example, and to participate in an extensive range of sports. The improvements made in teaching literacy and numeracy are raising standards. Teachers make work meaningful to pupils, and give them good opportunities to use their literacy, numeracy and computing skills in other subjects.
- The academy successfully places great emphasis on keeping pupils safe. The work of the parent liaison and the family support workers contribute strongly to making sure that staff are aware of any circumstances that might make pupils vulnerable, and are able to monitor them carefully. Rigorous monitoring and encouragement of attendance contribute to ensuring pupils' safety. Staff and governors receive suitable training to help them keep pupils safe, backed up by specialist expertise within the trust. Safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements and are effective.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Those responsible for governance have good systems to establish how well pupils are achieving, making good use of a wide range of data. They understand the systems to monitor the performance of teachers, and use them well to give a clear picture of the quality of teaching in the academy. They support senior leaders in addressing any shortcomings, as well as in rewarding good performance. Governance draws effectively on the wide range of expertise in the academy trust, both from its officers and from staff in other academies, to support developments. The expertise from the trust, combined with the local understanding of the governors, come together to provide good support and challenge to staff, and make a full contribution to the improvements being made in the academy.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils enjoy school and get along well together. Boys and girls work well collaboratively in class and play together cheerfully in the playground. They are tolerant of each other's mistakes, dealing with minor 'bumps' in playing a game with a friendly grin, before moving on. They appreciate each other's successes, often with spontaneous applause when someone achieves something notable.
- Pupils understand and appreciate the academy's systems of rewards and sanctions. They know that they can earn privileges, both personally and as a class, and are keen to do so. They try hard to live up to the academy's values.
- Pupils are keen to learn and enjoy the activities in class. They become involved in their tasks and show perseverance when they encounter difficulties. They take a pride in their success, and are keen to talk about their work. A significant strength of work in the older classes is the high degree of care that is taken, resulting in presentation of high quality.
- The breakfast club provides a cheerful and relaxed start to the day for pupils who attend. It makes a positive contribution to pupils' social development, as well as giving them a healthy breakfast. Relationships are good between pupils, and with adults, and behaviour is good. The club has helped in raising attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.
- Pupils work hard and usually concentrate well. They listen attentively to the teacher and to each other when they work cooperatively. Occasionally, when some pupils have finished their tasks quickly, or do not

find them challenging, then their concentration can be weak.

- Pupils who initially struggle to conform to the academy's expectations of behaviour are given effective help to do so. The academy provides them with support that is carefully tailored to their individual problems, and helps them to behave better, and to learn.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Good procedures ensure that the staff look after individuals and provide for any particular needs that they have. As a result, pupils are safe in the academy and feel safe. Parents are very positive about how well their children are looked after.
- Pupils are given a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, and how to contribute to the safety of themselves and their friends. They have learned a lot about keeping safe on the internet, for example, and can explain just what they should do in different situations.
- Pupils contribute well to safety around the academy by the sensible way they follow rules, and help look after each other. When outside, their play is often lively and boisterous, but never excessively so, and they show due consideration of each other and each other's space. They have learned about different kinds of bullying, such as cyber bullying, and know what to do if instances arise. They say there is little bullying in the academy, and that when there is misbehaviour is it usually 'silliness or arguments'. They are confident that adults deal quickly with any problems that arise.
- Pupils' greatly improved attendance and punctuality contribute to their safety.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is too inconsistent between classes, and between subjects, for pupils always to make good progress in lessons, despite the emergence of many strengths. In reading and writing, although records show that many pupils are now making the speed of progress to be expected for their age, this is still not rapid enough to overcome the legacy of underachievement in the past.
- Although teachers routinely set work at different levels of difficulty for pupils of different abilities, this is not always done accurately enough. Sometimes, the most-able pupils have to work their way through things they can do easily before tackling more-demanding tasks. As a result, their progress is not as fast as it could be. At other times, the most able make rapid progress when the work they are given is really difficult but manageable, but the middle ability pupils in the class have tasks which make little demand on their thinking, and do not give them the chance to develop their skills sufficiently. This is the main reason why the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics is not good overall.
- The work done recently to remedy shortfalls identified in some pupils' skills in aspects of writing and mathematics is not fully and firmly established across the academy. Some of the weaknesses in pupils' learning have been addressed successfully, but gaps remain in some individuals' spelling, writing and arithmetic skills that prevent them from making rapid progress.
- In many lessons, a key strength is the way that teachers and other adults check regularly on how well different groups are learning. This means that, if any pupils are confused, then the adults can identify their mistakes and give them timely help. It also means that adults are able to challenge those who are doing well to extend their thinking and to refine their work. All this leads to good progress in an increasing number of lessons. However, occasionally, teachers do not get round all the groups for some time, and then some pupils do not make much progress, because they have not fully understood what they should have been doing.
- The teaching of reading and writing is improving, and the system to teach younger pupils phonics (how the sounds in words are represented by different letters) is giving them a better foundation for further learning. Although improvements are patchy between classes and subjects, there are some very promising developments. Pupils in the current Year 5 class, for example, are already producing work of better quality than Year 5 pupils did at the end of last year.

- Teachers often engage pupils' interest well in lessons, and they keep them involved through a variety of successful approaches. Relationships are very positive and routines are well established. Pupils respect the teachers, and value the rewards and sanctions in place, which they see as fair, so settle down to work conscientiously during lessons. They enjoy discussing their ideas together, which develops their thinking, as well as their speaking and listening skills.
- The marking of pupils' work is good. Following a focus by all staff, teachers now give pupils clear advice about how to improve, as well as reinforcing what they have done well.
- Teachers make good use of skilled support staff to help disabled pupils and those with special educational needs to do well. This includes those pupils supported by the specially resourced provision. Teachers provide these pupils with work that is manageable but challenging. The adults who work with them draw a good balance between giving help when it is needed, and challenging pupils to do their best, and insisting that they do as much as they can for themselves.

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Pupils are not making enough progress to overcome weaknesses in their achievement from the past. Standards are generally too low, even given pupils' starting points when they entered the academy. Achievement is rising, but is not consistent enough to be good.
- Some residual weaknesses in pupils' basic skills in spelling, handwriting and mental arithmetic, slow their overall progress. Although these are being addressed rigorously by staff, there is more to do before these skills are secure.
- The proportions of pupils in current Key Stage 2 classes who reached the higher Level 3 by the end of Key Stage 1 remain low. However, improved progress in the younger classes means that a much greater proportion of the current Year 2 class are on track to reach Level 3 in reading, writing and mathematics this summer.
- The most-able pupils in each cohort tend to make the same variable progress as their classmates. While it is sometimes good, overall their achievement requires improvement. This is because teaching does not always challenge them sufficiently.
- The academy's records show clearly that, in the last year, achievement has improved significantly. Progress in reading and mathematics was generally in line with what is expected, so pupils did not slip further behind in these subjects, although many have still not caught up to where they should be. Progress in writing, however, was weaker than in reading and mathematics. The academy has identified reasons for this and is addressing them this year, with some success.
- Disadvantaged pupils make the same progress as their classmates, but not as much as other pupils nationally. Their attainment is generally no different from that of their classmates, and in some years is better. In last year's Year 6 class, for example, disadvantaged pupils made up two thirds of the class. They were a term and a half ahead of their classmates in mathematics, four terms ahead in reading, and five terms ahead in writing. In comparison to other pupils nationally, however, they were three terms behind in each of mathematics, reading, and writing.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. They benefit from careful programmes of help and support that are closely matched to their individual needs. Support from skilled teaching assistants backs this up, so that they cope well with tasks and achieve well.
- There are too few pupils currently in the specially resourced provision to comment on their achievement without identifying them.

The early years provision**is good**

- The early years provision is well organised and managed. After a turbulent year, when there was much disruption to staffing, the new teacher has quickly established a friendly, welcoming environment where children feel safe and happy, and are making good progress. The current class are being well prepared to start in Year 1. This was not the case for last year's class, who had not made enough progress in writing, and suffered from the changes in staff.
- Provision and progress are better in the early years than in the main academy because teaching is more consistent.
- Adults make good use of regular and thorough assessment to keep track of children's interests and achievement. They use this information well to plan activities that engage children's enthusiasm and that build well on their existing skills to help them learn.
- The adults give children good opportunities to be actively involved in a wide range of interesting and exciting activities, both indoors and out. The adults are particularly skilled when they intervene in children's play, questioning them to develop their thinking, and helping them extend their speaking skills and their vocabulary.
- Children enter the setting with a variety of skills and understanding that are below those typical for their age. The academy's assessments are thorough. By December 2014, many of the current class had already considerably increased their knowledge and understanding. The majority are now on track to reach a good level of development by the end of Reception, although the proportion reaching this level is likely to be below that found nationally. This shows a big improvement on last year, when less than half the cohort reached a good level of development.
- Children's behaviour is good. They get on well together, share equipment cheerfully, and take their turn in an orderly way. They listen attentively to the teacher, and follow routines well, including helping to tidy up at the ends of sessions.

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

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| Unique reference number | 139424 |
| Local authority | Northamptonshire |
| Inspection number | 449817 |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Academy sponsor-led |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 208 |
| Appropriate authority | The academy trust and the academic advisory board |
| Chair | Steve Cullingford |
| Headteacher | Angela Pratt and Liz Abel (co-headteachers) |
| Date of previous school inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Telephone number | 01604 493384 |
| Fax number | No fax available |
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