

Thorndown Primary School

Hill Rise, St Ives, PE27 6SE

Inspection dates 29–30 April 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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

- Pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics requires improvement in Years 1 to 6 although it is improving this year.
- Until this year a legacy of weak teaching resulted in too few pupils reaching the standards and making the progress of which they are capable, especially in writing.
- Teachers do not always use information about pupils' learning to plan and provide lessons that challenge all ability groups to make the best possible progress.
- The most-able pupils, disadvantaged pupils and those who speak English as an additional language have not been supported well enough to make good progress.
- Improvements made to raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics are not yet evident in other subjects. The same quality of planning is not fully in place in other subjects.
- Teachers do not ensure that pupils' work demonstrates accurate spelling and punctuation, or good presentation skills, in all classes.
- Although required by the school policy, pupils' individual targets for reading and writing are not always available in their books to show them how to improve their work.

The school has the following strengths

- The inspirational headteacher has already made a significant impact in the new school. Staff work together harmoniously for the benefit of all pupils. Parents are very pleased with the school's work.
- The senior leadership team and governors are working effectively to improve the quality of pupils' education. Teaching and learning have been transformed in the last three terms, and the gaps in attainment between different groups of pupils are narrowing.
- Children in the early years thrive and achieve well thanks to good teaching in the well-equipped and effectively-led setting.
- Pupils feel very safe and behave consistently well in class, outside and around school. Parents agree unanimously.
- The school has good relationships with pupils' parents and carers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 20 lessons, six of which were seen jointly with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and special educational needs coordinator.
- Meetings were held with the senior leadership team, the deputy headteacher responsible for mathematics, middle leaders responsible for each phase of the school, and the subject leader for English.
- Inspectors met with six members of the governing body and, separately, a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors had discussions with the school council and groups of more-able pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and those who speak English as an additional language.
- Inspectors took account of the 84 responses of parents and carers to Ofsted’s online questionnaire (Parent View), 11 letters and 57 questionnaires returned by staff.
- Inspectors looked at a range of pupils’ work in all subjects, school policies and documents, minutes of governors’ meetings, local authority evaluations and safeguarding arrangements.
- Inspectors studied data on achievement, attendance, the school’s own monitoring of teaching and learning, the school’s website and arrangements for managing staff performance.
- A small number of pupils were heard reading.

Inspection team

June Woolhouse, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Shan Oswald	Additional Inspector
Stephen Matthews	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Children in the early years attend one of three full-time Reception classes. Older pupils are taught in mixed-age classes: five in Years 1 and 2, five in Years 3 and 4 and two in each of Years 5 and 6.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is broadly average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, (those supported by the pupil premium, the additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority,) is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- A pre-school class, breakfast club and after-school care take place each day in the school's buildings, but they are not managed by the governing body and were not included in the inspection.
- The headteacher was appointed in April 2014. Since September 2014, seven new teachers have joined the school, and a new senior leadership team and four team leaders have been appointed.
- The school has recently undergone substantial building work.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to raise standards, especially in writing, by:
 - making sure that all groups of pupils are doing suitably challenging work, especially in mixed-age classes
 - giving pupils more opportunities for writing at length in subjects other than English
 - improving pupils' handwriting, punctuation and spelling skills, and insisting that they present work consistently well
 - checking on a very regular basis that letters and numerals are correctly formed and increasing the expectation of producing 'best work' regularly
 - providing children in the Reception classes with appropriate conditions to practise their writing and ensuring they sit at a table with correct posture and pencil grip.
- Raise standards and close attainment gaps between different groups of learners by:
 - checking the accuracy of teachers' assessments at least termly against what is typically expected in reading, writing and mathematics
 - monitoring closely the performance of specific groups, in particular the most able, the disadvantaged, and those whose first language is not English
 - linking what teachers plan and expect pupils to learn with the appropriate National Curriculum programmes of study
 - ensuring all pupils' subject targets for reading, writing and mathematics are present in their work books to aid their own checks on whether or not they are making good or better progress.
- Complete more detailed plans for what pupils will learn in all National Curriculum subjects, in line with those already in place for reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - setting out what pupils will be taught in each year group throughout the school.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is an outstanding leader. She has brought together the whole school community, and set high expectations that all pupils can achieve well and develop their personal, emotional and social skills. Relationships between adults and pupils are warm and encouraging. The school does all it can to ensure that pupils are treated equally.
- The senior leadership team, through regular monitoring in classrooms, has eradicated nearly all teaching that does not lead to good progress. As yet teaching is not consistently good enough to ensure that pupils achieve as well as they can or make up for the gaps in learning that were the result of previous ineffective teaching.
- The programme for teachers to improve their classroom skills and increase their knowledge of English and mathematics has led to more teaching that is good or better. The teachers whose work results in outstanding learning have shared their skills and this, along with other training for staff, has resulted in pupils making increasingly rapid progress, especially in reading and mathematics. Current information shows that standards are set to improve at the end of this year. Teaching and achievement in writing still lag behind reading and mathematics and require further improvement.
- The teachers who have leadership responsibilities for different year groups and subjects are making an increasingly effective contribution to improving teaching and learning. They check pupils' books to see if they are learning enough. Teachers check each other's assessments and plan weekly programmes of work together, but do not always make sure that lesson activities cater for the full range of ability in the mixed-age classes.
- The special educational needs coordinator is very effective in identifying and supporting pupils' individual needs, which are identified early and addressed through skilful support from teaching assistants. Extra support and guidance to help pupils cope better in school is extended to their parents. Pupils who speak English as an additional language receive effective specialist help so they can quickly play a full part in learning alongside their classmates. As a result both groups are making better progress this year, and their parents and carers comment very favourably on this.
- Senior leaders analyse information on pupils' attainment and progress twice a term. However, staff are not yet applying this system consistently in all year groups. Sometimes the learning targets leaders set for pupils in attempting to fill gaps in learning are unrealistic. Leaders are planning to modify and improve the system through teachers checking typical progress for each age group rather than giving numerical levels at the end of a key stage.
- Until this year pupil premium funds have not been used well enough to close the gap in attainment between disadvantaged and other pupils. This year the gaps have closed considerably. The gap has also closed for pupils who speak English as an additional language, thanks to skilfully management of support by the deputy headteacher. Parents and carers are delighted with their children's improving progress.
- The curriculum meets statutory requirements but some subjects require more detailed planning. Art, music, physical education and French benefit from the input of specialist teachers. Pupils comment favourably about these subjects, which contribute well to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Leaders use national funds to develop sports and physical education very well. Specialist teachers provide a comprehensive programme of games, dance, gymnastics, swimming and extra-curricular activities. Pupils are enthusiastic about the choices they have and high levels of participation contribute well to their physical, personal and social well-being.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are very effective and meet statutory requirements. Pupils learn how to stay safe outside of school. Teachers know how to identify untypical behaviours and act on them.

- The headteacher has led a drive to welcome parents and carers into school, surveys their views and act upon them. This has been well received as reflected in the responses: 'Thorndown Primary is a fantastic school,' and 'There is a really positive vibe in school now.' Parents also appreciate the well-focused events to support pupils' personal development. Their enthusiastic support for the school is confirmed by the results from Parent View and individual letters of appreciation.
- The school is inclusive of all its community and has an up-to-date policy to promote British values. Pupils participate in events that demonstrate the democratic process, such as voting on which decision to take. School records show that incidents of pupils using discriminatory language have decreased markedly because adults manage such occurrences consistently well. The school promotes systems to protect the environment and won an eco award in 2013.
- The local authority support is more effective this year and has contributed to more consistent planning and teaching in literacy and numeracy. Progress in writing is still variable across the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors play an effective role. They maintain a good oversight of how well the school is performing. They are led well by a very experienced Chair whose skills in finance are complemented by the educational knowledge of the Vice-Chair. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses and actively support senior leaders. They now check more rigorously how the pupil premium and sports funding are benefiting pupils
 - Governors now know how pupils' performance compares with similar schools nationally. They challenge senior leaders to account for pupils' performance. They understand that good teaching is necessary to raise standards.
 - Governors bring a range of experience to their roles. Their successful appointment of an outstanding leader has had a dramatic impact on the school and wider community, enhanced by a magnificent new building.
 - The governors monitor the performance of all staff diligently. They are aware of how any underperformance by staff is tackled, and make sure teachers' pay rises and promotion depend on how well their pupils perform.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils enjoy school and say they would not change anything. They praise the school dinners. They are enthusiastic about learning together as a whole class, in small groups or in twos and threes. They are typically polite to each other and adults. Behaviour has improved this year and anti-social incidents have decreased.
- Attendance has improved and is now above national averages. Family support workers are skilful in helping parents and carers to understand that attending school every day is essential for good learning. Persistent absences are continuing to decrease.
- Pupils like to get down to their work and organise their resources quickly. Younger pupils move efficiently and purposefully to their phonics (the sounds made by letters and words) groups and no time is lost when they return to classes. This is a noteworthy achievement.
- Pupils concentrate well in the majority of lessons but occasionally they lapse into conversations with their friends when work is too hard or too easy. This was more noticeable in some mixed-age classes.
- Pupils behave well at lunchtimes and on the playground. They are sociable and enjoy talking or playing with their friends. Older pupils support younger ones at these times and pupils know that adults are there to reassure them if there is a problem.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel very safe and have detailed

knowledge of the systems that contribute to their safety, both in school and the wider community. Adults are trained well to understand all safeguarding matters.

- Pupils say that bullying is rare and that adults manage any incidents effectively. This is confirmed by parents, who are complimentary about the speed with which the headteacher responds to any behavioural concerns. All adults manage any inappropriate behaviour consistently well in a supportive and reasonable way to ensure pupils are safe.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is improving, but is not consistently good in all classes or subjects. The school's records show that more pupils are making the progress expected for their age, but teaching is not good enough to overcome the legacy of underachievement of the past two years, particularly in writing.
- Teachers plan work carefully for different abilities but not precisely enough to assure different groups make good progress, most notably in writing. Teachers identify weaknesses accurately but the follow-up work does not always address what has not been learned previously. Many pupils cannot write fluently or at length.
- Pupils struggle in Year 3 and 4 because they started the year without all the expected skills and knowledge in English and mathematics, so some work is too hard. Effective support is given to small groups. Assessments show pupils are making improving progress in reading and mathematics. However, this is not the case in writing. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, pupils who speak English as an additional language and the disadvantaged pupils also make slower progress in writing than in reading and mathematics.
- In the separate Year 5 and 6 classes pupils are making faster progress because work is suited to what different ability groups need. The more-able benefit from dedicated teaching and are on track to achieve well by the end of both years. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs or are disadvantaged are closing the gaps in reading and mathematics. Their progress in writing remains slower.
- The work in pupils' books varies in quality and quantity across and within year groups. Handwriting, punctuation and spelling are not consistently good enough to ensure high-quality presentation.
- Staff teach phonics systematically and effectively in Years 1 and 2. Pupils are grouped based on what they already know. They build and read new words in sentences and then write sentences of their own. Older pupils are challenged to increase their comprehension skills in guided reading sessions. As a result, reading results have improved across the school.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge leads to some outstanding learning in mathematics for older pupils. Interesting work challenges pupils to think more deeply to solve problems. Other teachers are benefiting from opportunities to learn from this best practice.
- Staff foster good relationships in all classes. Pupils respond enthusiastically in most lessons. They work diligently and cooperate well even when learning slows. They enjoy explaining what they are doing to solve mathematical problems or improve their writing. Teachers set homework on a weekly basis and indicate on the school's website other suitable learning activities.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils do not make enough progress to reach the standards they are capable of by the time they leave at the end of Year 6. Attainment improved in 2014. Currently pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Their progress is improving, but it is not yet good for all.
- In the 2014 Year 6 national tests pupils' attainment was broadly average in reading and mathematics, but

below average in writing. Pupils did not make sufficient progress in reading or writing from their Year 2 starting points. Current information shows that the proportion of pupils on track to achieve expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics is improving.

- In the 2014 Year 6 national tests disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 were more than two terms behind other pupils nationally in writing, three in mathematics and four in reading. They were in line with their classmates in writing, but three terms behind in mathematics and reading. Current information shows a narrower gap between their attainment and that of other pupils nationally. Much better teaching and individual support have increased rates of progress.
- In the 2014 Year 2 tests pupils' attainment was below average due to weaknesses in writing and mathematics. Reading was much improved from the previous year. This improved attainment matched the above-average results in the national Year 1 phonics check in 2013. Current pupils are on track to achieve higher standards with more attaining the higher Level 3.
- The most-able Year 6 pupils did not achieve well enough in reading, writing and mathematics in 2014. Only about 6% achieved the higher Level 5 in all subjects. Three pupils achieved Level 6 only in mathematics, nonetheless a creditable performance. In Year 2 not enough pupils reached the higher Level 3 in writing or mathematics, and all groups underachieved in writing.
- In 2014 disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs in Years 2 and 6 made good progress and did not differ significantly from the national average. Current information indicates these pupils are making equally good progress this year, although some gaps remain in Years 3, 4 and 5. Early identification of pupils' needs and good teaching have improved their achievement.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language are identified quickly and given effective support in small groups. Current information shows they are making expected progress in reading and mathematics.

The early years provision

is good

- The early years provision is led and managed well. Resources are attractive and suited to the needs of young children. Stimulating materials support their interests. Skilled adults help children to explore their world, communicate with each other and share experiences safely. Children play happily together, are considerate and behave well. The foundations for effective learning are established here and children are thoroughly prepared for Year 1.
- Staff use the outdoor area to give children a wealth of opportunities to develop their skills and lots of space to be physically active. All children reach a good level of physical development. Overall, more children achieve good levels of development than are seen nationally, including those eligible for the pupil premium. This has been the case for the past two years.
- Children learn the sounds letters make in a consistent, timely way each day and make good progress. Adults understand the integrated nature of this important introduction to reading. Interactive whiteboards are used well to display letters and children can check when they apply their knowledge to writing sentences. Children often lie on the floor, which adversely affects how they form their letters, and hold their pens. Children who speak English as an additional language are particularly well supported and guided. They are introduced early to language structures they will use the following week.
- Children learn rapidly in the early years because teaching and the support for what children want to explore are consistently effective. Adults have implemented good advice from the local authority. Well-kept and attractive records show clearly the progress each child makes throughout the year. Parents and carers can see precisely what their children learn. All safeguarding and health and safety procedures are in place.

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	136814
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	462129

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	430
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Frank Newton
Headteacher	Vicci Godbold
Date of previous school inspection	12 June 2013
Telephone number	01480 375103
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