

Tithe Farm Primary School

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

Inspection dates

27–28 September 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders at all levels, including the governing body, have not done enough to secure sufficient improvement since the previous inspection.
- Over time, the monitoring of provision and support given has not been sharp enough to iron out inconsistencies in provision or to ensure that teaching is consistently good. Consequently, pupils' progress is uneven, especially in mathematics.
- Middle leaders, such as those in charge of subjects, do not have enough responsibility for improving the quality of teaching.
- Teachers do not always expect enough of pupils in English, mathematics or subjects such as science, history and geography.
- Teachers sometimes plan work that is too hard or too easy for pupils.
- Teaching assistants do not have a strong effect on pupils' learning, especially those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Early years provision requires improvement. Teaching does not move children's learning on quickly enough.
- The pupil premium is not used equally well across the school to help disadvantaged pupils, especially the most able, to fulfil their potential.
- The school website does not include the required information on the use of the pupil premium.
- Pupils are not always attentive in lessons. They lack resilience when working and give up too quickly if work is difficult.
- Pupils feel safe and well cared for but have a limited understanding of how to avoid dangers when using the internet.

The school has the following strengths

- The acting headteacher and the governing body have a good understanding of the main priorities. They have made a start to addressing them so that they can build on improvements in attainment made last year, especially at the end of Year 6.
- Pupils' knowledge of phonics has improved in the early years and key stage 1.
- Pupils are polite and courteous and take good care of each other.
- Parents are supportive of recent changes. They feel that these are helping to improve the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels, including the governing body, use their monitoring to identify and then deal with inconsistencies across the school
 - increasing the quality of support and challenge given to teachers, including through performance management arrangements, to help teaching to improve more quickly
 - giving middle leaders more responsibility for supporting the acting headteacher to improve outcomes for pupils and the quality of teaching
 - using the pupil premium more effectively to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils in different year groups
 - ensuring that the website is fully compliant with statutory guidance.
- Improve teaching in early years provision and key stages 1 and 2 so that pupils make good progress from their starting points by:
 - ensuring that teachers always expect enough of their pupils in the different subjects and provide work that is not too hard or too easy for them
 - using teaching assistants more effectively to support pupils' learning, especially for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - ensuring that pupils understand the importance of being attentive, listening carefully in lessons and not giving up when work is too hard
 - doing more to teach pupils about how to stay safe online.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders have not secured sufficient improvement since the previous inspection. While the pace of change has picked up over the last year, there remains too much inconsistency in the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.
- Over time, teachers have not been given enough support and challenge to help them improve. The checking of teaching has not been sufficiently rigorous to help teachers understand what they are doing well and what they could do better. Teachers are not set suitable targets through performance management, so it has had a limited effect on the quality of teaching.
- Staff turnover and difficulties in recruiting experienced staff has been a barrier to improvement and is one of the reasons why teaching has not improved more quickly. It has made it difficult to ensure that initiatives are sustained. However, systems for checking provision are not rigorous enough to ensure that policies such as the school's marking policy are being applied consistently.
- Middle leaders are enthusiastic but do not play a big enough part in securing improvement. They are now more involved than in the past in checking provision for themselves, but they do not get sufficient opportunity to visit lessons so that they can get the full picture about pupils' learning and help to improve teaching. The acting headteacher has already implemented plans to strengthen this aspect of their work by giving them more time out of class.
- Additional government funding is not used to good effect to help disadvantaged pupils attain as well as all pupils nationally. Funding is focused more on some year groups than others. Consequently, not all disadvantaged pupils benefit equally from support. However, funding is used well to support pupils' personal development, especially for children who are looked after.
- The acting headteacher has quickly identified the most important areas of development in the school. She is working closely with the local authority and a consultant headteacher to secure the needed improvements across the school. While it is too soon to see the benefits of recent changes in outcomes for pupils, staff report that morale is much higher and that they are clear about what the acting headteacher is trying to achieve. Together with governors, staff share the acting headteacher's high ambitions for the school. Their planning for improvement is clear about what is needed to secure good progress for all pupils.
- The acting headteacher has ensured that teachers who are new to the profession receive support to help them improve their skills. They have been given good-quality training to help them to understand their responsibility in areas such as safeguarding.
- The primary sport premium is spent effectively to extend the opportunities that pupils experience and their understanding of the benefit of sport for their health and personal development. Specialist sports coaches have provided support to develop pupils' physical skills. Pupils have good opportunities to try out new sports such as tag-rugby.
- The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Recent changes have made it more engaging so that work is becoming more relevant and enjoyable to pupils. The acting headteacher has acted quickly to address parental concerns about a lack of clubs and visits. A wide range of clubs were due to start shortly after the inspection. Year 3 and

Year 4 pupils spoke very positively about a recent visit to Warwick Castle which was linked to their work in class.

- The school successfully supports most aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils learn to be sensitive to the views of others. They keenly take responsibility by, for example, being house captains. Adults are good role models in the way that they treat each other and work together. Pupils have a reasonable knowledge of cultural diversity but the acting headteacher is already implementing a programme of activities to extend this further. The 'Values Cup' plays an important part in promoting pupils' understanding of British values. It is a great motivator for pupils as it rewards values such as tolerance, kindness and respect.
- Parents are positive about recent changes. They feel that the school is improving. They like the way that the acting headteacher has made the school feel more welcoming.

Governance of the school

- The governing body has not secured sufficient improvement in the overall effectiveness of provision since the last inspection. Governors have not ensured that the pupil premium is used to good effect for all pupils and that there is sufficient reporting on its use on the school website.
- There have been some good recent improvements in the quality of governance because they are receiving a wider range of information about the school than in the past. Consequently, they are now able to challenge other leaders about school performance. This means that governors have a realistic picture of the current position. They know what needs to be done to improve teaching further and are providing the acting headteacher with the support needed to make this happen.
- Governors are beginning to be more proactive in developing their own systems for checking the quality of provision. This is in the early stages of development but a good start has been made by, for example, encouraging governors to visit school more regularly.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff receive regular training on all aspects of safeguarding. Checks on staff and record-keeping are thorough and ensure that the safety of pupils is not compromised. The school works effectively with a wide range of outside agencies, as well as parents and the local community. Staff are quick to take action if any concerns arise about the welfare or safety of a pupil. Staff and governors have a good understanding of the need to protect pupils from radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it is not consistently good across the school. This results in pupils making uneven progress.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not consistently high enough because they do not always assess accurately their different starting points. Work does not always capture pupils' interest because it is not well matched to their different starting points. Work is sometimes too hard or too easy for pupils, especially in mathematics. Too often, the most able complete activities that are too easy for them before they are able to move on to work that is suitably challenging.

- Teaching assistants do not have a strong effect on pupils' learning. They are not used effectively so that their skills can be utilised fully. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are often over-reliant on help from teaching assistants to complete work because it is sometimes too hard for them.
- Although the quality of teaching is not yet consistently good, work in pupils' books shows that it is benefited from improving teaching over the last year. As teachers are given more support and guidance from current leaders, they are becoming more skilled at adapting work to the needs of pupils so that it is more closely matched to need. However, this is not yet consistently strong in all classes.
- There are strengths to teaching across the school. The teaching of phonics is securing better progress for pupils. This is reflected in the improving outcomes in the Year 1 phonics check. Phonics skills are introduced systematically and they improve quickly.
- Teachers make imaginative use of resources to bring subjects alive. They try to make learning purposeful by, for example, linking subjects together around a central theme such as 'turrets and tiaras'.
- Teachers apply the school's behaviour policies consistently. They get on well with pupils and ensure that there is a happy atmosphere in lessons. They are beginning to follow the school's new marking policy to give pupils clear feedback about what they are doing well and how they could improve.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils lack resilience when working. They sometimes give up too easily when a task is too difficult and do not always persevere well enough when work demands this.
- While pupils feel safe in school and have a good understanding of how to avoid dangers in the local environment, they are unclear about the potential pitfalls of using social media. The school does not give sufficient priority to teaching about e-safety so that pupils can stay safe online.
- The school rightly prides itself on the nurture of its pupils, including those with specific needs. Staff are quick to identify pupils' emotional and health needs and to take steps to support them. Staff meet regularly to identify and discuss any barriers to learning for vulnerable pupils, such as those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or children who are looked after.
- Pupils confirm that there is practically no bullying of any sort. They are confident about speaking to staff about any concerns they might have.
- Pupils keenly take responsibility. The school council helps pupils to learn about citizenship and to contribute to school development. Pupils appreciate that their views are valued and they are proud of their school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- There are occasions in lessons when pupils are inattentive or do not listen well enough

when the teacher or their classmates are talking. Pupils are sometimes slow to settle when they move to a task and they do not always concentrate well enough.

- Pupils' attendance has been below national levels for the last two years. New reward systems and strategies have improved attendance this year and it is now close to the national average. The school continues to work closely with the small number of families where attendance is more sporadic to help them to understand the effect this has on their children's learning.
- Pupils are polite, courteous and friendly. They conduct themselves well when moving around school. They have a clear understanding of how the school's new behaviour policy works and appreciate that good behaviour is rewarded. They are well motivated to 'stay on green' because they know that this means that they are doing well.
- Pupils respond well to routines such as lining up, and they follow instructions. They play together happily outside and support each other well.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Outcomes require improvement because pupils' progress is not consistently good. There remain pockets of underachievement, especially in the current Years 4, 5 and 6. These year groups have been most affected by staff turnover.
- Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6 has varied significantly over the last two years. In 2015, pupils' attainment was too low, and their progress over time was not good enough, especially in mathematics. This year group had many pupils who had joined the school during key stage 2 with especially low attainment.
- At the start of the last academic year, the school recognised that outcomes for Year 6 needed significant improvement and did all it could in the last year to ensure that pupils did better. Consequently, attainment at the end of Year 6 rose in 2016, with just over two-thirds reaching the expected level in all of reading, writing and mathematics. In the spelling, grammar and punctuation test nearly all pupils reached the expected level. However, the school is still over-reliant on giving Year 6 pupils extra support to help them catch up.
- Progress across the school remains uneven, especially in mathematics, where older pupils lack confidence in applying their knowledge to practical activities such as problem-solving.
- Less able pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not make good progress because work is not matched well enough to needs.
- The most able pupils also make variable progress. They are not always challenged well enough to improve their skills quickly. As a result, across the school, including in early years provision, too few pupils are working at the higher levels for their age.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not make good progress in all year groups. Spending has largely been focused on helping disadvantaged pupils in the early years and in Years 2 and 6. This has helped to improve progress in these year groups, with notable success in the early years, where all disadvantaged children reached a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year in 2016. Children looked after also progress well academically because of the support they are given to help them catch up. However, support though the pupil premium is not spread widely enough to ensure that all disadvantaged pupils, especially the most able, benefit and are enabled to fulfil their potential.

- Across the school, pupils' work in subjects such as science, history and geography, varies in quality. Some work in these subjects lacks challenge, especially for the most able, and does not allow skills to improve quickly enough.
- While progress remains uneven, pupils' attainment is beginning to rise in some year groups. Attainment at the end of Year 2 improved in 2015 and these higher standards were maintained in 2016. Across the school, pupils' workbooks show that progress is picking up because there is more good teaching now than previously. In Year 1, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level in the national phonics check was close the national average, also reflecting improved teaching.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- The leader's actions are bringing about improvements in the early years. Children's attainment rose in 2016, and the proportion reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year was closer to the national average in 2016 than it has been in the past. Consequently, children are being better prepared for life in Year 1 than they were previously.
- Children make steady rather than rapid progress because teaching does not always meet their needs well enough. While there is a happy atmosphere when children are working, there are some missed opportunities to move learning on more quickly, especially for the most able. Sometimes, children are left without adult support for too long, also slowing the progress they can make.
- In both the Nursery and Reception classes, most children quickly develop good attitudes to learning and join in enthusiastically in their work. They are encouraged to develop skills well in their own play, both indoors and outdoors, although some activities do not have a clear purpose, resulting in some children flitting between them.
- The teaching of phonics in the Nursery and Reception classes is good. Work is fun and engaging and includes good opportunities for children to link phonics with their writing by, for example, painting letters or making them out of playdough. Children show a keen interest in words and letter sounds and demonstrate a growing ability to apply their phonics knowledge to work out unfamiliar words.
- Child protection and safeguarding arrangements are thorough. Adults ensure that children behave well most of the time. However, just occasionally staff do not make their expectations clear enough, especially when they are sitting in a large group. At these times, children lose concentration and do not listen well enough. Nonetheless, most children understand how they are expected to behave. They learn quickly to become self-reliant and helpful.
- Communication and engagement with parents and carers is becoming increasingly effective. Parents say that receiving a weekly newsletter about classroom activities helps them to work with their children at home. The class teachers are developing home-school partnerships further by, for example, starting a 'reading café' where parents and their children can share books together.
- Leaders have received good support from the local authority. This has resulted in improvements in teaching and the learning environment that is already having a positive effect on children's progress. There is a good understanding of what needs to improve next. For example, a start has already been made to ensure that the most able are always challenged well enough.

- Leaders make good use of the early years pupil premium to support disadvantaged children. Consequently, in 2016, all reached a good level of development, although few attained beyond this.
- Leaders have improved provision for two-year-olds after weaknesses were found by an Ofsted survey visit earlier in the year. These children now attend nursery by themselves in the afternoon and provision meets statutory welfare requirements. The classrooms are set up effectively to take account of the children's age. For example, beds are made available for children if they get tired. Adults plan an interesting range of activities that focus closely on developing early social skills and children's speech and language. The two-year-old children are happy and settled. They explore their own ideas, with adults supporting them sensitively when appropriate. However, as elsewhere in early years provision, adults do not always move learning on quickly enough by adapting activities or using questioning to provide more challenge.

School details

Unique reference number	109585
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10019590

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	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	261
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Goodchild
Acting Headteacher	Jamie Carmichael
Telephone number	01582865047
Website	www.tithfarmprimary.co.uk
Email address	s.surgey@cbc.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	6–7 November 2014

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about the use and impact of the pupil premium.
- This is an average-sized primary school with ten classes. Children in the early years are taught in a Reception class and a nursery. The nursery takes only two-year-old children in the afternoon session.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is above average.
- The school met the government's current floor standards in 2015, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

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- Since the previous inspection there have been several changes in teaching staff.
- The substantive headteacher has been absent from school since May 2016. The deputy headteacher has been acting headteacher since then.
- The school is receiving support for one day per week from the headteacher of Leadon Lower School.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed pupils' learning in lessons, three of which were observed jointly with the headteacher. In addition, the inspectors made some short visits to observe learning at other times.
- Discussions were held with pupils, staff, representatives from the local authority and members of the governing body.
- The inspectors took account of the views of 12 parents and carers who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also talked with parents at the start of the school day.
- The inspectors listened to pupils read, looked at their work and school documents, including: the school's own information about pupils' learning and progress; planning and monitoring documents; the school development plan; records relating to behaviour and attendance; safeguarding information; and health and safety documentation.
- The inspectors analysed responses to an inspection questionnaire from 27 members of staff.

Inspection team

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Ofsted Inspector

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