

Thorns Primary School

Thorns Road, Quarry Bank, Brierley Hill, West Midlands DY5 2JY

Inspection dates

9–10 March 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Governors, leaders and teachers did not respond quickly enough to the raised expectations in the new national curriculum.
- Not enough pupils make the progress of which they are capable, especially in key stage 2, and outcomes are too low.
- The quality of teaching is not consistently good. Pupils make uneven progress across subjects, year groups and pupil groups.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are developing but are not yet consistently high enough. Activities do not always match the ability of the pupils, especially the most able.
- Leaders' plans to improve the school have not been sufficiently targeted. Assessment of pupils' progress has not been accurate enough.
- Some pupils do not know well enough how to improve their work. Some teachers miss opportunities to clarify pupils' next steps in learning.
- Some pupils' basic skills are weak. In literacy, this is impacting on pupils' ability to write fluently. In mathematics, it is affecting their ability to apply skills in order to solve problems.
- Teaching assistants are not always effectively deployed to support pupils with their learning.
- The role of middle leaders and subject coordinators has not been sufficiently developed to impact on raising standards.
- Some aspects of pupils' understanding of fundamental British values, such as democracy, are not as well developed as others.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils behave well in lessons and around school. They are polite and respectful to adults and each other.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is strong. Pupils feel safe in school. They are eager to learn and attend regularly.
- Parents are positive about the school and the approachability of staff and leaders.
- The proportion of pupils reaching a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year has increased in each of the last three years and is now in line with the national average.
- In 2016, an above-average proportion of pupils were secure in their phonics skills and knowledge at the end of Year 1.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning so that all pupils, especially the most able, make more rapid progress by:
 - ensuring that teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve and that teaching is closely matched to pupils' needs
 - ensuring that teaching assistants and other adults are effectively deployed, especially during whole-class teaching
 - ensuring that pupils develop the basic skills in literacy and mathematics
 - providing pupils with more opportunities to reason and apply their learning across a wide range of contexts and subjects
 - developing teachers' skills in assessing precisely what individuals and groups of pupils need to do to improve their work and achieve well.
- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels by:
 - ensuring that the school improvement plan clearly reflects the school's priorities and is tightly focused on addressing these
 - ensuring that assessment systems are robust and pupils' progress is accurately measured and recorded
 - further developing the role of middle and subject leaders to ensure that their skills are used effectively to support progress and improve outcomes across the school
 - ensuring that pupils are more aware of fundamental British values.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management are not good because outcomes for pupils need improvement and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is uneven across the school.
- Governors and leaders at all levels did not respond quickly enough to the raised expectations in the new national curriculum. As a result, the English and mathematics curriculum did not fully meet the needs of the pupils and they did not make as much progress as they could. Governors and leaders have taken action to address this. In key stage 1, where a new approach to the teaching of phonics has been in place for 12 months, the impact of these actions is clear and pupils are making more rapid progress.
- Leaders acknowledge that there is too much variability in the quality of teaching across the school. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially the most able, are not consistently high enough.
- The senior leadership team and governors are clear about the areas in which the school needs to improve and they are taking action to tackle these. However, the school's plan for improvement is not sufficiently focused. As a result, the impact of leaders' work can become diluted as they try to tackle too many areas at once.
- English and mathematics middle leaders are now more accountable for the progress pupils make in their subjects, but there has not been enough time for new strategies to become embedded and have full impact. The roles of some other area and subject leaders are not sufficiently developed to be effective in improving outcomes.
- While school leaders have rightly focused on English and mathematics, the wider school curriculum is broad and balanced and based on a range of topics which engage pupils' interests, for example 'the blue abyss' and 'stargazers'. Pupils are encouraged to ask their own questions to investigate during each topic. Science has a higher profile across the school and regular science lessons develop pupils' knowledge of the world and a sense of enquiry. The curriculum is brought to life through a range of trips and visitors. For example, during the inspection, Year 5 pupils visited Thinktank to support their science topic, while pupils spoke enthusiastically about weekly assemblies led by local volunteers. Pupils benefit from a range of extra-curricular opportunities, including a choir, arts and crafts, different sports and support for mathematics and homework.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are quickly identified and their needs are addressed in a variety of ways, including extra support in class and specialist interventions from both school staff and external agencies. Funding is used to address identified needs and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) monitors the support that pupils are receiving, although she does not routinely track the impact of interventions on each pupil's progress. This means that teachers are not clear which interventions are the most effective and outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not consistently good across the school. The SENCo works closely with parents, who appreciate the information and

support that they receive. Teachers have had training to help them meet the needs of all the pupils in their class.

- School leaders are aware of the academic, social and emotional barriers to learning that disadvantaged pupils face and they appropriately target the use of the pupil premium funding to address their needs. This includes the most able disadvantaged pupils.
- The physical education and sport premium funding is used effectively to improve pupils' participation in and enjoyment of sport. There are a range of clubs run by a sports coach on offer before, during and after school. School leaders actively respond to pupils' interests, for example a girls' football team has recently been started. Class teachers have not had training to provide this level of activity should the funding stop.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is a strength. Pupils are tolerant, respectful and friendly to each other. During an assembly, pupils listened well and enjoyed celebrating each other's achievements. Pupils are taught about diversity, other cultures and religions and are being well prepared for life in modern Britain. There is still some work to be done on raising pupils' awareness of some aspects of fundamental British values, such as democracy and understanding the rule of law. Leaders are aware of this and have plans to address this issue.
- Parents are positive about the work of the school, commenting on the happy atmosphere, the positive way in which staff and leaders respond to any issues raised and the progress their children are making. One parent summed up the views by writing, 'Always made to feel welcome, a lovely, friendly, structured learning atmosphere'.

Governance of the school

- The governing body has an understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They are aware of what needs to be done to accelerate pupils' progress and are supportive of the changes that have been made to raise standards in English and mathematics in the last 12 months.
- Governors are knowledgeable about the school's data and the quality of teaching. They provide leaders with a balance of support and challenge. Governors are clear about how funding is being spent to impact on pupils' progress.
- Governors are dedicated to improving the school, under the leadership of the experienced chair of governors. They are committed to working with school leaders to address the areas for improvement.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff understand their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. There are clear systems in place to record any concerns that adults may have about pupils' well-being. Leaders maintain the required records and information is shared with relevant external agencies. Leaders are persistent when concerned about a pupil's welfare and follow up with the appropriate agencies as necessary. Staff and governors receive the relevant

training to fulfil their statutory responsibilities.

- Pupils say that they feel safe and secure in school and know who to talk to if they have any worries or concerns. This includes keeping safe online. Pupils are confident that any issues raised will be quickly resolved.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is too uneven to promote consistently good progress for pupils in English and mathematics. Over time, teachers have not made effective use of assessment and teaching has not provided enough challenge, particularly for those who are most able.
- Teachers were not well prepared for the raised expectations within the new national curriculum and, because of this, pupils' needs were not fully met. This weakness is being successfully addressed through the introduction of new schemes of work, training for teachers and a new approach to assessment. Where these new systems have been in place for 12 months, the impact on pupils' progress is clear. Where these approaches are newer, it is too soon to say what the impact will be.
- Progress for some pupils is being held back because their basic skills are not strong enough. In writing, poor letter formation and handwriting are having a negative impact on pupils' ability to write fluently. In mathematics, pupils do not have swift and accurate recall of number facts, including multiplication tables. This is hampering their ability to solve mathematical problems. Teaching is now focused on addressing these needs on a daily basis and improvements can be seen in some pupils' books, for example in Years 5 and 6, but this is not yet consistent across the school.
- Teachers' use of additional adults in the classroom is variable. Where they are used well, small groups of pupils receive targeted support during lessons so that they can improve their work. For example, teaching assistants are particularly effective in the teaching of phonics. However, this good practice is not consistent and there are missed opportunities to develop pupils' learning, particularly during whole-class teaching at the start of a lesson.
- The school's policy for giving pupils feedback is clearly understood by pupils and enables them to identify how their work can be improved. This is not yet being applied consistently across the school and pupils do not always know what the next step is in their learning. Teachers do not always provide pupils with enough opportunities to learn from their mistakes and improve their work.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and classrooms are generally calm and positive environments in which to learn. As a result, pupils stay focused on their work most of the time. They are engaged and keen to complete their work to a good standard. Sometimes, the level and demand of the work set do not match the specific needs of the pupils. For example, activities can be too challenging for lower-ability pupils or those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, while being too easy for those who are most able. The most able pupils are not routinely given opportunities to work at the higher standards that they could be capable of achieving.
- Senior leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching and learning and the progress

pupils are making. The school's new approach is more rigorous and is now matched to the raised expectations within the new curriculum. Assessments are becoming increasingly accurate. The accuracy of the system is checked through the use of external tests and when teachers from across the local area meet to compare outcomes and standards.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is generally good and, consequently, they teach most concepts securely. However, some teachers have found aspects of the new curriculum challenging. Training and support are provided by the senior leadership team, although subject leaders are beginning to take more responsibility for staff development. Teachers are also starting to work with colleagues in other schools to share expertise.
- In mathematics, pupils are starting to develop their reasoning skills and they are encouraged to explain how they have worked out an answer. Teachers are including more opportunities for pupils to solve mathematical problems within their lessons. Pupils enjoy these challenges, especially when they can select their own approach to working out the answer.
- The quality of pupils' writing is improving. Pupils have more opportunities to write at length and lessons are structured to allow pupils to apply their skills in new contexts. For example, in a Year 6 literacy lesson, pupils worked independently to write a newspaper report based on a character in their class novel. This was a successful activity because, having completed a newspaper report earlier in the term, the pupils knew what they were aiming to achieve.
- Pupils generally read well, with fluency and understanding. There are strong routines in school to promote reading and pupils are motivated as a result of quizzes and competitions. Younger pupils are able to apply their phonics skills to read new and unfamiliar words.
- Phonics teaching is a developing strength since the introduction of a new approach 12 months ago. There are clear routines in place and sessions are engaging. Teachers and teaching assistants model letter sounds clearly and employ a range of multi-sensory approaches to support pupils' learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school's nurturing environment promotes all aspects of pupils' welfare. This is valued by parents. Each classroom includes a range of displays to support pupils' learning and celebrate their achievements.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. They understand what bullying is and the various forms that it may take, including cyber bullying. They are clear that incidents of bullying in school are rare and are confident that any concerns will be dealt with quickly by an adult.
- Older pupils have the opportunity to take on a range of school-wide responsibilities, for example head boy and girl, the friendship group, the eco-committee and assembly monitors. Pupils take these roles seriously and are proud to undertake them. For example, one pupil said, 'I love coming to this school. It is a real privilege to get this

job.’ As a result of input from the head boy and girl, additional resources are available at lunchtime, while the friendship group has introduced the use of a ‘worry box’ to support pupils across the school. These opportunities are helping to prepare the pupils for the next stage in their education.

- The school runs a breakfast club which provides an opportunity for pupils to socialise with friends and adults. The atmosphere is welcoming and relaxed. Pupils take part in a range of physical activities which they enjoy. For example, one Year 6 girl spoke proudly about how much her stamina at skipping had increased over the year.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are well mannered, confident and friendly. They are proud of their school. Pupils show respect for the ideas and views of other pupils, and work together cooperatively to support each other’s learning. For example, in a literacy lesson, a pupil noticed a classmate was struggling and helped her to successfully find a word in the dictionary.
- Behaviour in classrooms is generally of a high standard, with most pupils being keen to learn. Occasionally, pupils lose focus or become distracted if the level or the pace of the lesson is not right for them. This can have an impact on the progress that they make.
- The school’s behaviour policy is effective and focuses on motivating the pupils to behave well. Pupils and staff understand the policy and use it consistently. Pupils appreciate this consistency and sense of fairness.
- Overall attendance is improving and is now a little better than the national average. The vast majority of pupils arrive at school on time and are keen to learn. Strategies to improve attendance are proving effective and staff are rigorous in following up any absence to ensure that pupils are not missing from education.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Outcomes require improvement because progress across the school is not good enough in reading, writing and mathematics and attainment is too variable from year to year. School assessments indicate that the progress of pupils currently in school is still inconsistent across subjects and from class to class. This is confirmed by evidence in pupils’ books.
- In the 2016 key stage 2 tests, the percentage of pupils who met the expected standard for their age was just below the national average and the proportion of pupils achieving at the higher standard was just above the national average. However, progress for this cohort of pupils was very poor and, as a result, their attainment was significantly below what they could have achieved.
- Across the school, the most able pupils are not achieving as well as they could. They are achieving at the standard expected for their age but many are not achieving the higher standards of which they are capable.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils vary from year to year. In some year groups, many

disadvantaged pupils also have special educational needs and/or disabilities and this has an impact on their starting point and the amount of progress that they make. Funding to support pupils is targeted at individual needs and the provision is appropriate. However, the impact of these interventions is not tracked carefully enough to allow leaders to know which approaches are making the biggest difference. The difference in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in school and nationally varies. In some years, for example in the key stage 2 tests in 2016, disadvantaged pupils do as well as other pupils nationally, while in other years the difference is not diminishing. Outcomes for the most able disadvantaged pupils are also inconsistent.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make variable progress in reading, writing and mathematics from their starting points. Leaders do not routinely measure the progress pupils make during an intervention. This has an impact on their ability to identify which activities are the most effective in moving pupils' learning forward.
- In the 2016 key stage 1 tests, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard for their age in reading and writing was close to that seen nationally, while the proportion reaching the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average. This represents good progress from the end of the early years for the majority of the pupils.
- Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check were above the national average in 2016.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Early years provision requires improvement because leadership and management responsibilities are not sufficiently well defined and this means that opportunities to improve children's outcomes may be missed.
- The early years teacher is confident and knowledgeable but she does not see herself as leading the provision. The early years team is clear about individual children's needs and work well together to address these needs. Progress is tracked by senior leaders. Information about different groups of children and different areas of the curriculum is not effectively shared by leaders at all levels and so there are gaps in their knowledge, which could have an impact on children's progress. There is not an action plan to support improvements in the early years.
- Children come into the early years with knowledge and skills below those which are typical for their age. Over the last three years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development has risen each year and in 2016 was in line with the national average. The majority of children are well prepared for their transition into Year 1.
- The early years curriculum is focused on developing children's literacy skills. Phonics skills are taught well and children are making progress. Children are beginning to write independently and enjoy reading and writing activities. The early years teacher has adapted the curriculum to take into account the needs and interests of the children. For example, the theme of 'Star Wars' and rockets has made a positive impact on the

engagement of the many boys within the year group.

- The outdoor area provides a range of literacy and mathematical opportunities, as well as activities linked to the current topic. This complements the activities available for children to choose indoors. Adults encourage conversation, prompting children and asking them questions to develop their thinking and deepen their understanding. Technology is used effectively to record children's activities.
- The children are well cared for and nurtured so that they feel increasingly confident, and they are eager to join in activities. Children's behaviour is good and they show respect for each other. They play cooperatively together, sharing resources and discussing their activities.
- Safeguarding procedures are effective and welfare requirements in the early years are fully met.
- Early years staff encourage regular communication with parents. This starts in the summer term before the children officially begin school and is effective in building confidence and helping the children to settle quickly.

School details

Unique reference number	103787
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	10025313

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Cadwallader
Headteacher	David Priestley
Telephone number	01384 818 285
Website	www.thorns-p.dudley.sch.uk
Email address	dpriestley@thorns-p.dudley.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–20 March 2013

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average primary school.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage, with other pupils coming from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- The percentage of disadvantaged pupils is above national levels.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to that found in most primary schools.
- The school runs a breakfast club. This provision is managed by the governing body.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about the curriculum, accessibility, the use of pupil premium funding and the use of physical education and sport premium funding on its website.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed pupils' learning in 11 lessons or parts of lessons. A number of these observations were undertaken jointly with a member of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also made additional short visits to many classrooms to gather evidence on particular aspects of the curriculum or pupils' learning.
- Inspectors met with pupils and listened to some pupils read. They looked at examples of pupils' work in their books and spoke to pupils formally and informally. The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, lunchtime and around the school, as well as in lessons.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, other leaders and members of staff. The lead inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. The lead inspector also met with three representatives of the governing body, including the chair and the vice-chair of governors.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, the school's recruitment and vetting checks, records relating to safeguarding and attendance, minutes of meetings of the governing body, information relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning, school performance data and the school's website.
- Inspectors considered parents' opinions through scrutinising 12 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including six free text responses. The lead inspector spoke to parents on the first day of the inspection and also considered outcomes from the school's own survey of parents.
- Eighteen responses to the staff questionnaire were considered as part of the inspection.

Inspection team

Catherine Crooks, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alison Broomfield	Ofsted Inspector
Marie Conway	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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