

Thorn Grove Primary School

Thorn Grove, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 5LD

Inspection dates

23–24 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	Requires improvement
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

- The school has not maintained the good standard of education achieved at the time of the last inspection.
- Leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness is too generous. School improvement planning could be sharper.
- Subject leadership is not consistently strong.
- Pupils do not make consistently good progress from their different starting points. The most able pupils could be challenged more.
- The differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and others nationally are not diminishing quickly enough.
- The progress made by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities depends on what key stage they are in.
- The quality of teaching is too variable and can lead to low-level disruptive behaviour in some classes. Teachers' expectations are not consistently high and good practice is not routinely shared.
- Teachers' assessments of pupils' progress are not compared with progress made by pupils nationally. Writing skills are not yet strong.
- Pupils' attendance, although improving, remains below the national average.
- The early years provision requires improvement. Leadership of the early years provision is not yet strong and teaching is not securing good progress.
- Some parents believe communication with them could be improved.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher has a clear vision for the school. He is committed to improving the school's effectiveness and has already improved standards of behaviour.
- Strategies for further improving the school have been identified and some have been implemented, but as yet, it is too early to see the impact of these.
- Pupils are kept safe and secure. Their conduct as they move around the school and when at play is good and they are happy in school. Bullying is rare and pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe.
- Governors are determined that the school improves and visit regularly.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - evaluating the school’s current performance more accurately and realistically
 - using the amended self-evaluation document to identify the key actions which will make the school good and linking this to a school improvement document which incorporates systems to check on progress
 - ensuring that subject leaders are held robustly to account for the areas they oversee
 - putting in place systems to assess pupils’ progress in subjects other than English, mathematics and science
 - improving lines of communication with parents.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils make consistently good progress by:
 - ensuring that teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - ensuring that teachers compare pupils’ progress with pupils who have similar starting points nationally
 - maintaining a strong focus on improving pupils’ writing skills
 - providing more stretch and challenge for the most able pupils
 - ensuring that the differences in the progress of disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers nationally diminish at a faster rate
 - ensuring that the good support offered to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in key stage 1 is matched in key stage 2
 - sharing the effective practice more routinely
 - establishing more accurate systems to assess children’s levels on entry to the early years provision.
- Make behaviour good by:
 - eradicating low-level disruptive behaviour
 - improving pupils’ attendance so that it is at least in line with the national average.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The school has not continued to improve since the previous inspection. Leaders became complacent and this led to a decline in pupils' outcomes in the years that followed. In addition, pupils' behaviour deteriorated to such an extent that much of the senior leaders' time was taken up dealing with behavioural issues.
- The school's evaluation of its effectiveness is too generous. It relies too much on the actions taken following the appointment of the new headteacher, but it is too early to measure the impact of many of these actions.
- The self-evaluation document rightly identifies many areas for improvement and these also feature in the school's improvement plan. However, the improvement plan would benefit from being sharper with regular times during the year when leaders and governors can monitor for measurable impact.
- Subject leadership is not consistently strong enough to move the school forward at a fast enough pace. Subject leaders do not routinely meet with the headteacher on a regular basis so that he can hold them to account for their subjects. Systems for assessing pupils' progress beyond English and mathematics are at a very early stage of development. Subject leaders have produced action plans, but the success criteria in these are not fully measurable.
- Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, are of the opinion that communication between the school and them is a weakness. The school's leaders provided a good example of how they have tried to take parents' views on board better. This involved consulting parents about the congestion posed on the road outside the school when they pick up their children. The outcome of this consultation is that a staggered end to the school day is being considered so that the traffic congestion will be removed.
- The special educational needs funding has a mixed impact. Pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan make good progress because of the good quality of provision mapping and well-targeted interventions. Pupils who receive special educational needs support in key stage 1 achieve well because their teachers take accountability for their progress and liaise well with teaching assistants. Similar pupils in key stage 2 have their needs identified early, but the monitoring of the impact of the provision is too slow, sometimes taking five or six weeks to see if the right provision is in place.
- The new headteacher has a clear vision for the school. He joined the school at a difficult time in its history, and quickly realised that there were many challenges to overcome. He has swiftly addressed poor levels of behaviour. This view is validated by staff, governors and parents.
- The curriculum offers a broad and balanced choice of subjects and has the potential to allow pupils to achieve well. This is further enhanced by a suitable range of after-school and lunchtime clubs, including homework clubs, dance and drama clubs and a recorder club.
- The school makes effective use of PE and sport premium funding. This has given more

pupils wide access to sports and access to high-quality coaching. Class teachers are also being upskilled in order to deliver higher-quality physical education provision.

- The allocation of the pupil premium funding has been carefully considered in order to support pupils who are disadvantaged. Activities include one-to-one tuition, support for participation in school trips, activities which aim to raise pupils' self-esteem and aspirations and funding additional sessions in literacy and numeracy. The impact of this fund has been positive, but the school's leaders recognise that they need to further diminish the differences between these pupils' progress and that of others nationally.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Fundamental British values are also well understood. The school council offers pupils the opportunity to debate issues which affect them in school. Pupils also contributed towards the writing of the school rules which gives them greater ownership for managing their own behaviour.

Governance of the school

- Members of the governing body clearly want the school to improve and acknowledge that further work is required in order to become a good school. They share the headteacher's vision for the school.
- They have made a concerted effort to get to know the school's strengths and weaknesses by visiting the school more. This is made possible because they have linked themselves to classes or areas, such as safeguarding, and they report back on their findings and identify important points for further action.
- Between them, they have a good range of essential skills in order to support and challenge the school's leaders and managers. These include the interpretation of data; health and safety; and human resources.
- Minutes of meetings of the governing body show that they do not simply accept what they are told, but ask pertinent questions, including how the pupil premium funding is spent.
- They communicate well with staff and parents by attending staff meetings and through a regular contribution in the school's newsletter to parents.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's single central record of recruitment checks of staff is fully compliant with current requirements. Personnel files are very well maintained. All staff have received up-to-date safeguarding training and read the latest guidance entitled 'Keeping children safe in education' which came into force in September 2016.
- All staff have a good understanding of their role in keeping children safe. They demonstrate a sound understanding of how to recognise signs that a child might be a victim of domestic abuse or neglect. All staff have received 'Prevent' duty training which aims to prevent young people from being drawn into terrorism. Inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' files, including those subject to child protection, indicates that

record-keeping is detailed and robust.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching over time has not secured good progress across the school and for all groups of pupils. Because the quality of teaching is variable, some year groups perform better than others.
- Teaching in the school does not consistently stretch and challenge the most able pupils. Inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' books and observations of their learning demonstrate that teachers' expectations are not consistently high.
- Sometimes when pupils have finished their work, they are left to their own devices rather than being given some additional, and more challenging, work.
- The quality of some teachers' questioning is not sharp enough. Sometimes, teachers' questions do not test for deeper understanding. In some lessons, teachers do not check regularly enough that pupils have understood what they are learning. This means that some pupils cannot make the progress of which they are capable, because misconceptions are not always corrected.
- The impact of teaching assistants is variable. Sometimes, these members of staff appear to be used to manage pupils' low-level disruptive behaviour, rather than facilitate pupils' learning and progress.
- Systems for assessing pupils' progress are at different stages of development, and for some subjects they do not exist. The headteacher showed inspectors a proposed system for assessing pupils' progress in humanities which he has brought from his previous school.
- There is some effective practice in the school. Strong subject knowledge is evident in Year 1 and the teaching develops pupils' reading and understanding of phonics well. The teacher's planning for learning in Year 4 engages and enthuses pupils which makes them want to learn and achieve well.
- Scrutiny of pupils' mathematics books in Year 5 shows that pupils are achieving age-related expectations. The teacher's written feedback helps different groups of pupils make effective progress, including pupils with low and middle prior attainment and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils are proud of their school and have positive relationships with their teachers.
- There is a positive community spirit in the school, and pupils are keen to support one another. The school's house system has contributed to creating this team spirit and enables pupils to engage in healthy competition.

- Pupils feel safe when in school and are taught well about how to keep themselves safe, including on their journey to and from school.
- Pupils have a good understanding of e-safety and of the risks associated with the use of the internet.
- Vulnerable pupils are well supported and the school makes effective use of external agencies when required to do so. Children who have protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are well cared for. The school presented a case study for one child in which it demonstrated its support and care, working well with parents and classmates to ensure that the child thrived in school until they left.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Pupils display low-level disruptive behaviour in some classes, particularly when the teaching does not challenge them or is not interesting enough. They lose concentration or need reminding to listen to their teacher and this interrupts the flow of the lesson.
- Pupils' attendance is not yet in line with the national average for primary schools. The school's leaders presented inspectors with some case studies which explain why a few pupils have attended school less regularly. However, even when these are taken into account, pupils' attendance remains below the national average.
- Pupils' persistent absenteeism is not being reduced at a fast enough rate because meetings with these pupils' parents lack a strong focus on holding them to account for their child's attendance at school.
- Incidents of bullying do occur, but are quite rare. The school's records of bullying incidents do not always accurately reflect whether actual bullying took place or whether it was more a matter of pupils falling out with one another.
- The new headteacher has successfully improved pupils' conduct around the school. Inspectors observed pupils behaving well at breaktimes and at lunch and socialising with each other well. There is a good staff presence around the school, and this ensures that the school's rules are maintained and boundaries are known and adhered to.
- Although the proportion of fixed-term exclusions has risen recently, this is due to the higher expectations of the new headteacher. This has led to much better conduct than was the case in the past.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' progress over time has not improved quickly enough. Pupils enter this school with levels of prior attainment which are broadly average or slightly above. Pupils' progress in writing in 2016 at key stage 2 was below average. This was also the case in mathematics. Pupils' progress in reading was below average, due to a weak performance by boys in the school.
- At key stage 1 in 2016, pupils' progress in reading and mathematics was below average.

- The most able pupils do not make good progress because the work they are given is not always challenging enough. The school has chosen to teach mathematics in mixed-ability groups, and to teach mathematics using an approach adopted in the Far East. Although this course has the potential to secure rapid progress, pupils are not being stretched and challenged at an appropriate rate. Pupils' problem-solving and reasoning skills are weak in some year groups.
- The progress made by disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, is variable. In some instances they achieve well, but there is currently too much variation in the rate of progress made by these pupils compared to their non-disadvantaged peers and other pupils nationally.
- Pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan progress well as they move through the school. Those pupils who receive special educational needs support make better progress in key stage 1 than in key stage 2 because support and interventions are better targeted in Years 1 and 2.
- Inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' books across a range of subjects and year groups, as well as observations of teaching, shows that the progress made by current pupils in the school is variable. Writing skills are not yet consistently strong. This is dependent on the extent to which the teachers plan for the specific needs of the pupils they teach, their confidence in teaching the subject and the expectations they convey. Not enough pupils in the school are working at greater depth.
- Pupils are not sufficiently prepared for their move to secondary school because outcomes are not yet consistently good. However, effective links with the secondary schools ensure a smooth transition when they leave Thorn Grove.
- A good proportion of pupils in Year 1 achieved the required standard in the phonics screening check in 2016.
- Pupils are encouraged to read. The most able pupils demonstrate a love of reading and are encouraged to read across a range of genres. The weaker readers make effective use of their phonics skills to break up longer words so that they can pronounce them correctly. Pupils maintain a record of the books they read and understand how reading more helps them to develop their writing skills.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- The leadership of the early years provision is not yet strong. Inspectors were not convinced about the leaders' assessments of children's ability on entry to the school. Evidence suggests that most children start in Reception class with skills that are typically average for their age, and not below as claimed by the school's leaders. This means that the progress they make before entering Year 1 is not good.
- Since the previous inspection, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception Year has been inconsistent. In 2014 and 2016 the proportion of children achieving a good level of development was below the national average. This does not reflect good progress from children's starting points.
- Leaders tend to focus too much on developing children's social skills when they start at the expense of promoting a good level of development. This has an impact on the

progress made by children.

- Record-keeping in the Reception class is not always well maintained. This makes it hard to track children's progress as they move towards Year 1.
- Teaching is not yet securing consistently good progress because teachers' assessments of children's prior attainment are not accurate. This means that when they plan for individual children's learning, their judgements of what children can achieve are sometimes flawed.
- Disadvantaged children achieve broadly in line with their non-disadvantaged peers.
- The outdoor space offers children a wide range of opportunities. It has a good mixture of materials and resources, and provides plentiful opportunities for children to construct and create, whether playing alone or with children and adults. The outdoor provision also engages boys well in their learning.
- Inspectors saw some good examples of children attempting to write, using well-shaped letters.
- The recently introduced induction visits have had a positive impact on helping children to settle in quickly and to build up positive relationships with parents.
- Children behave well and have positive attitudes towards their learning. They are encouraged to work collaboratively with one another.
- Safeguarding is effective. Staff have a good understanding of safeguarding procedures and apply them well. Children are safe and happy in the setting.

School details

Unique reference number	117277
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10023375

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	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Catherine Gater
Headteacher	Peter Luck
Telephone number	01279 653002
Website	www.thorngrove.herts.sch.uk/
Email address	head@thorngrove.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 November 2012

Information about this school

- Thorn Grove is an average-sized primary school in the market town of Bishop's Stortford.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is around half the national average. The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is broadly average.
- The school faces challenges in the recruitment of staff.
- No pupils at the school attend any alternative provision.
- The new headteacher took up his post in September 2016.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum

expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about the date of the next review of its pupil premium strategy, the special educational needs and disability information, the accessibility plan and the provision of paper copies of information on the website for parents.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was conducted at half a day's notice. Inspectors observed lessons in every year group, sometimes accompanied by senior leaders, to observe pupils' learning and progress. Inspectors also scrutinised a large number of pupils' books, focusing particularly on the progress made by different groups of pupils in the school.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, five members of the governing body and two groups of pupils. A telephone conversation also took place with the Hertfordshire improvement partner. Inspectors also listened to pupils read from Years 1 and 6.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents including the self-evaluation summary and improvement plan, information on pupils' learning and progress and records of the quality of teaching. They also looked at the school's behaviour records and the record of recruitment checks of staff.
- Inspectors considered 51 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. There were no responses to the staff or pupil questionnaires.

Inspection team

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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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