

Thorplands Primary School

Farm Field Court, Thorplands, Northampton, Northamptonshire NN3 8AQ

Inspection dates

18–19 July 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The principal provides strong and inspiring leadership. She is determined that Thorplands' pupils will leave the school well prepared for their secondary education.
- The principal has quickly developed an effective team of senior leaders. Together, they have secured better teaching through high-quality training and coaching.
- School staff work well together. They are a positive and dedicated team, willing to go the extra mile to ensure that pupils achieve well.
- The members of the academic advisory board have a wide range of expertise. This enables them to provide the necessary support and challenge to school leaders.
- Good teaching and accurate assessment ensure that pupils who are currently in school make good progress in key stages 1 and 2.
- The current Year 6 pupils reached standards in line with the national averages in writing and mathematics. However, standards were not as high in reading.
- Children in the Reception class love the exciting range of activities and enjoy discovering things for themselves. They make good progress from their starting points.
- Pupils work with concentration and enthusiasm in lessons. At breaktimes, they have a great range of activities to enjoy, including climbing trees and making dens in 'the secret garden'.
- Pupils thrive in this happy school. Their personal development is outstanding.
- The rich and varied curriculum includes many opportunities for pupils to work independently and show initiative and imagination. There is an excellent range of clubs, including sporting clubs, for pupils in key stages 1 and 2.
- Leaders have taken decisive action to improve the quality of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, provision for this group is not yet consistently strong throughout the school.
- Pupils frequently develop their writing skills in different subject areas. There are fewer opportunities for pupils to practise or extend the skills they learn in mathematics.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Their attendance is above the national average. Pupils feel safe and cared for well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' achievement in reading in key stage 2 by ensuring that:
 - the recently introduced strategies to encourage them to read more frequently and with greater understanding are successful
 - pupils are more skilled in inferring meaning from a text and predicting what might happen next.
- Improve pupils' achievement in mathematics by:
 - increasing the number of opportunities pupils have to apply what they have been learning in mathematics in subjects across the curriculum
 - having high expectations of pupils when they are using their mathematical skills in other subject areas and providing additional mathematical challenge for the most able pupils.
- Ensure that the special educational needs coordinator has sufficient opportunities to work with teachers to secure consistently high-quality provision for pupils who require additional support.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal, along with other senior leaders, knows the local community well. She is determined that the pupils at Thorplands will overcome the barriers posed by economic disadvantage, and will achieve well in school and in their later lives. Her ambition is to 'break the chain' that so often links disadvantage to educational underachievement.
- The principal has successfully encouraged staff to be confident teachers. Teachers value the opportunities to record their own teaching and then review their practice with a senior leader. Best practice is shared among colleagues and there are opportunities to visit other schools to further improve the quality of their teaching.
- Regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning have enabled leaders to quickly identify weaker performance. There is compelling evidence of how coaching and other support has improved the practice of individual members of staff. In addition, the principal has introduced rigorous performance management. This closely links salary progression to improving outcomes for pupils.
- Teachers, especially those who are relatively new to teaching, praise the support that they receive from senior leaders and the training they get to improve their skills. Regular meetings with staff always include a discussion about their own well-being. This too is appreciated by all staff.
- The headteacher has a small, but very effective team of senior leaders. This team is relatively inexperienced. However, individual leaders can already point to how their work is securing improvements in their areas of responsibility. For example, in mathematics, staff have accepted invitations from the subject leader to attend after-school sessions on the teaching of mathematics. This has helped to raise the quality of their teaching in this subject.
- The school offers an exciting curriculum that motivates pupils and contributes to their outstanding personal development. Leaders are committed to improving literacy and numeracy skills through a curriculum that gives pupils many opportunities to show initiative and creativity. As a result, the curriculum very successfully promotes spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils benefit greatly from the strong partnership with the Royal Shakespeare Company.
- Pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain. Through their school council and pupils' surveys, they gain a practical understanding of democracy in action. In addition, lessons and assemblies regularly focus on school values, such as 'respect' and 'responsibilities'. This focus ensures that pupils learn about the importance of the rule of law and the importance of 'treating other people the way you want to be treated'.
- Leaders use the pupil premium funding very effectively to ensure that disadvantaged pupils achieve well. Throughout the school, disadvantaged pupils are making accelerated progress. The differences between their attainment and other pupils nationally are diminishing.
- Leaders also get good value for money from the physical education and sport premium. The range of sporting activities on offer before, during and after school is extensive. Across key stages 1 and 2, pupils are increasingly participating in sporting clubs and

competitions. However, the school does not track participation to ensure that all groups of pupils are equally accessing the opportunities available.

- Earlier in the school year, the trust led a review of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. In the past, funding provided to support this group was not used effectively. An interim special educational needs coordinator is starting to implement, with some success, the recommendations identified by the review. This interim post will be made permanent at the start of the new academic year. It is planned that she will have increased opportunities to fulfil her responsibilities and provide high-quality support both for staff and for pupils.

Governance of the school

- In the autumn term, a new academic advisory board was constituted. Key appointments to this board widened its range of expertise and strengthened its ability to meet its responsibilities.
- Members of the board share the ambition of school leaders to secure a high-quality education for all pupils. Minutes of meetings of the board show a sharp focus on the progress and attainment of the different groups of pupils in the school.
- Members of the board visit the school regularly. They have strong experience in areas such as leadership and management, analysing data, teaching, special educational needs, and health and safety. This enables them to check, with insight, how effectively the school is implementing its improvement planning.
- The Education Fellowship holds leaders to account through its close monitoring of the pupils' performance. The chief executive of the trust is in regular contact with the school and monitors the school's progress every six weeks.
- Senior leaders value the support provided this year by officers of the trust. Links established with other schools in the trust have been particularly supportive and effective in helping to improve both leadership and provision.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Regular training ensures that all staff understand their role in keeping children safe. The school maintains careful records of any concerns staff have about pupils' well-being. These records show how the designated safeguarding leaders act rigorously to ensure the safety of pupils. They analyse the nature of the referrals to identify trends. They keep all staff informed of any emerging risks to pupils' welfare.
- The three designated safeguarding leaders know the school community very well. They are alert to the range of local issues that can affect family life and put pupils at risk of harm. Where necessary, they signpost families to external agencies that work to ensure the welfare of children. If required, they are happy to accompany and support parents at meetings where they are seeking assistance.
- Leaders work effectively with families and other agencies to ensure the well-being of children whose circumstances may make them particularly vulnerable. The trust and members of the academic advisory board prioritise safeguarding and monitor the

school's work in this area carefully.

- Leaders ensure that pupils are kept safe in school and on educational visits. Any risks different activities may present are identified and staff are clear about the measures they must take to minimise risk.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Assessment of pupils' learning has improved since the previous inspection. It is thorough and accurate. Teachers know which pupils need to revisit skills they have not mastered and which pupils are ready for more challenging work. This improved practice is leading to better progress for all groups of pupils throughout the school.
- Strong subject knowledge promotes good learning. For example, one teacher drew upon a personal love of literature to deepen the pupils' response to the book 'Wonder'. The teacher promoted a strong appreciation of the author's craft without diminishing the pupils' emotional response to the story. Pupils were pretty much unanimous that this was the best book they had ever read.
- Teaching and learning in mathematics have improved since the previous inspection. Partly, this reflects the impact of training provided to help teachers ask questions to develop and deepen understanding. In lessons, pupils are encouraged to use drawings and objects to help them grasp what mathematical symbols and numbers represent. These strategies too are improving pupils' reasoning skills and their ability to solve problems.
- Observations of teaching and work in pupils' books show that pupils have few opportunities to develop their mathematical skills in subjects across the curriculum. Where mathematical knowledge and skills are required to be used, expectations are typically not high enough. Measurements are inaccurate and there is insufficient mathematical challenge for the most able pupils.
- Teaching assistants are deployed very well. They are skilled in giving timely and effective support to individuals and groups of pupils. They work well as part of the teaching team, and play a significant and important role in pupils' learning. One teaching assistant commented that since the new principal took up her post, she has been much happier about her role. 'I feel like I have started a new job,' she said.
- In key stage 2, pupils do not make as much progress in reading as they do in writing and mathematics. Until recently, there has been an insufficient focus on developing reading skills, such as predicting and inferring. There is some evidence that the school's newly introduced strategy to secure better progress in reading is encouraging pupils to read with greater frequency and with deeper understanding.
- Teaching is beginning to meet the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities more successfully. Most class teachers are planning more effectively for pupils who require additional support. They are providing clearer guidance for teaching assistants who work with individuals and small groups of pupils. However, leaders recognise that securing consistently strong provision will be a key task for the special educational needs coordinator in the next academic year.
- The high priority given to the teaching of phonics leads to consistently above average outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Teachers monitor each individual's

progress very carefully and provide any additional interventions that are required.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils who met with inspectors have a clear understanding of how education can help them to achieve their dreams. They have high aspirations and know that working hard and learning from their mistakes are essential characteristics of successful learners.
- The whole-school theme on the 'The Tempest' has fired the imaginations of many pupils. It has given them insight into careers and interests they had never previously considered.
- Pupils are committed to living out the school's five values – Respect, Responsibility, Courage, Curiosity and Perseverance. They are adamant that all the different ethnic groups learn and play as one big family at school. The school council is rightly proud of its work. It has played an important role in the development of a 'meditation room' where pupils will have a quiet place to reflect. This is due to be operational in December 2017.
- Pupils work very successfully in groups. They share roles, listen to each other's ideas and take pride in completing tasks with minimal adult supervision. Inspectors particularly enjoyed seeing the short films pupils had made to accompany their own musical compositions, and sampling the outcomes of their 'Bake Off' competition.
- The school is very alert to the emotional stresses pupils encounter, both inside and outside school. The curriculum gives high priority to teaching pupils how to 'listen to their body' to help them recognise times when there is a risk to their well-being. The family support worker plays a key role in ensuring that pupils learn strategies to help them to deal with such situations and so stay safe.
- Pupils gain an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles through their physical education and science lessons, input from external agencies and the wide range of clubs which encourage their physical and emotional well-being.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe online. They are fully aware of the potential dangers of sharing personal information and images online.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is above the national average.
- The inspection took place during the last week of the school year. It was impressive to see the pupils working with undiminished enthusiasm and concentration in their lessons.
- Pupils mix well at breaktimes. They say that there are few arguments because there are so many different activities to enjoy. Bullying is rare and always dealt with

effectively.

- The school manages the behaviour of pupils with challenging conduct effectively. It keeps scrupulous records of any incidents of poor behaviour. These explain the actions taken to help pupils manage their feelings more successfully or, in a small minority of case, to keep them safe. The number of incidents of poor behaviour has decreased rapidly this year.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In recent years, pupils leaving Thorplands have not been well prepared for their secondary schools. This year, much greater proportions of pupils are leaving the school with the skills and knowledge that are essential for successful learners.
- In mathematics and writing, pupils' outcomes are particularly strong. Their attainment in these subjects is in line with the national average. The improvement in mathematics is greatest. Almost one third more pupils attained the expected standard this year than in 2016.
- Attainment in reading is still below the national average. However, over two fifths more pupils attained the expected standard than in 2016. The school is anticipating that this proportion will increase once the results are validated.
- From their starting points, all groups of pupils currently in Year 6 made good progress. In the past, boys have underachieved. This year, boys' achievement was much higher. For example, the proportion of boys who reached the expected standard in reading and mathematics increased by over two fifths in both subjects.
- There were similarly pleasing gains for disadvantaged pupils. Their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is now considerably closer than previously to that of other pupils nationally.
- Teachers' higher expectations have enabled the most able pupils to make better progress. Throughout the school, greater proportions of pupils are reaching standards above those expected for their ages.
- Pupils' outcomes, since the previous inspection, have been much more positive at the end of key stage 1 than at the end of key stage 2. This year, the proportion of Year 2 pupils reaching the expected standard in writing was in line with the national average. In reading, it was above the national average.
- Outcomes in mathematics have improved this year, but the proportion of Year 2 pupils attaining the expected standard is below the national average in 2016.
- Scores in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 indicate that pupils' outcomes are likely, again this year, to be at least in line with the national average.
- Art and design work and design technology work around the school show the high priority the school gives to promoting good achievement in these areas. Similarly, the impressive number of trophies won this year, in a wide range of sporting activities, is evidence of outstanding sporting achievement by boys and girls throughout the school.

Early years provision

Good

- Most children start the Reception Year with skills below those typical for children their age. They make good progress. The proportion of children who achieve a good level of development is consistently in line with the national average. Disadvantaged children progress as well as other pupils.
- The proportion of children who exceed the skills expected in the different areas of learning is small and below the national average.
- This year has seen boys making much better progress than in the past. They now achieve just as well as girls. The introduction of an online learning journal has led to parents becoming much more active partners in their children's learning. This increase in parental engagement has had a very positive impact on boys' outcomes.
- Both indoors and outdoors, the learning environments are inspiring. A wooded area, known to the children as 'the secret place', is an ideal location for a picnic. 'This is the best thing ever,' one girl giggled as she enjoyed a healthy picnic alongside her classmates and a huge model of 'The Hungry Caterpillar'. The children's good manners, kindness to each other and their respect for the adults who help them each day were admirable.
- Children learn right from the start the high standard of behaviour the school expects. They know that they must listen carefully to adults, take turns when working together and always be aware of the feelings of others. When these standards are met, children enjoy praise and often the whole class gains a reward. Staff, however, will not shy away from sensitively addressing conduct that is not in line with class rules.
- Staff are suitably trained and very aware of the issues that can indicate a child's well-being may be at risk. They check very closely for any signs that children are upset or tired when they arrive at school. They ensure that throughout the day the children move safely between the varied areas of learning.
- The Reception Year children were fully involved in the school's focus on 'The Tempest'. The theme promoted good writing, speaking and listening skills. In addition, displays in the classroom show how effectively the theme encouraged the children to be imaginative, and to use different materials to create puppets and models. Enriched by a visit from a local theatre company and the loan of a boat, the children's first encounter with Shakespeare was clearly a memorable and valuable experience.
- Staff check very carefully how well each child is learning. This ensures that children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified early and benefit from effective additional support. Where necessary, prompt referrals are made to outside specialists.
- Children make good progress developing their phonics skills. Frequent checks of how successfully each child is learning ensure that staff know precisely any areas they need to revisit or the next skills they need to master. These regular assessments are crucial in securing good progress of children who speak English an additional language.
- The experienced and skilled early years leader has successfully created an effective team of adults who share her infectious passion and drive to see young children thrive. She has a clear understanding of the strengths in the early years but is always striving to improve provision still further.

School details

Unique reference number	139424
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	10031138

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	206
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Jay Davenport
Principal	Madeline Dunckley
Telephone number	01604 493384
Website	www.thorplands.education
Email address	head@thorplandsprimary.net
Date of previous inspection	17–18 March 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- A new principal took up her post in September 2016. A new vice-principal took up her post in April 2017.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment at the end of Year 6.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is close to the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above the national average.

- The school runs a breakfast club.
- Just over half the pupils are White British. The remainder come from a variety of different minority ethnic groups.
- In September 2016, the regional schools commissioner wrote to the members and trustees of the academy's sponsor, The Education Fellowship Trust (TEFT), due to its poor performance. In March 2017, the Department for Education agreed to a request from the trust to terminate their funding agreement for all 12 of their schools. As a result, all of them, including Thorplands Primary School, will be re-brokered by the regional schools commissioner. At the time of the inspection, the new sponsor had not been confirmed and, therefore, TEFT remains in place as the sponsor until that matter is resolved.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all classes.
- Inspectors looked at work in pupils' books.
- Inspectors met with pupils and spoke with them about what it is like to be a pupil at Thorplands. They also heard pupils read and observed their behaviour at breaktimes.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, other staff, three members of the academy advisory board and the executive headteacher of the Education Fellowship.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation, including: the school's self-evaluation; the school's improvement plan; the school's most recent information on pupils' attainment and progress; and information relating to teaching, attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.
- Inspectors spoke with parents and considered three written views about the school shared by parents.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, for this potential source of evidence about the school to be considered. Inspectors did analyse a recent survey of parents' views taken by the school.
- Twenty-one members of staff shared their views about the school through their online survey. Fourteen pupils completed their survey. Inspectors took these views into account.

Inspection team

Anthony O'Malley, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Greenhough	Ofsted Inspector

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