

# Thwaites School

Hallthwaites, Millom, Cumbria LA18 5HP

## Inspection dates

19–20 March 2019

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

- Recent turbulence in the school's leadership arrangements has taken its toll on the quality of teaching that pupils receive. Despite the determined actions of current leaders, too much teaching is ineffective and requires further improvement.
- Teaching does not routinely provide pupils, including the most able, with work that challenges them sufficiently, because teachers' expectations are sometimes too low. This has a negative impact on the progress they make over time, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise and improve their writing and mathematical skills across a wide range of subjects.
- Children in the early years do not have enough opportunities to practise and develop their important early writing and phonics skills in ways that challenge them to think for themselves.
- Governors do not ask leaders enough challenging questions about their plans for improvement, to enable them to hold leaders fully to account for pupils' outcomes.
- Personal development, behaviour and welfare require improvement because pupils' otherwise good behaviour falters when teaching does not challenge them sufficiently.
- Improvements that leaders have made to the curriculum are at too early a stage to have had an impact on pupils' progress.

### The school has the following strengths

- Extremely committed leaders and governors have successfully established a happy, highly inclusive school in which all pupils and families feel safe and welcome.
- Pupils at Thwaites School enjoy reading and make strong progress from their starting points. They talk enthusiastically about the books they read in school and at home.
- Leaders' innovative approaches to reducing absence have resulted in attendance that is now broadly in line with the national average.
- Pupils at Thwaites develop well spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. The headteachers lead pupils and staff by example in their active promotion of diversity and equal opportunity.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - governors ask leaders more challenging questions about their progress with their plans for improvement, so that they can hold them better to account for pupils' outcomes.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by making sure that:
  - teachers have consistently high expectations of what all pupils can achieve from their individual starting points
  - teaching routinely provides work for all groups of pupils, particularly the most able, that is sufficiently challenging so that they are able to make strong progress, especially in writing and mathematics
  - in the early years, children have more opportunities to practise their important writing and phonics skills in ways that challenge them to think for themselves.
- Improve pupils' outcomes by ensuring that more make the progress of which they are capable and, where appropriate, reach at least the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they leave Year 6.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- A period of turbulence in the school's leadership and staffing since the previous inspection has taken its toll on the quality of teaching at Thwaites School. This has had a negative impact on pupils' outcomes, especially in writing and mathematics. Plans for improvements have taken longer to implement than expected. Despite the determined actions of the current leaders, too much teaching is ineffective and requires further improvement.
- Effective arrangements for the school's leadership are now in place. The current headteachers have a clear vision focused on the improvement of outcomes for pupils. They have made sure that governors have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders and governors are therefore taking the right actions to improve the school. However, it is too early to see the impact of these improvements on outcomes for pupils in the national tests at the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Recent changes that leaders have made to the teaching of mathematics have improved teachers' subject knowledge so that there is now greater consistency in the way that pupils learn across classes and year groups. However, there remain weaknesses in how pupils learn to solve problems and practise their reasoning skills in mathematics, so that not all pupils, including the most able, make the progress they should.
- Leaders' improvements to the teaching of writing have been slower to have an impact on pupils currently in school, in all key stages. Teaching does not routinely challenge pupils, especially the most able, to enable them to make strong progress.
- Leaders have put a great deal of thought into devising a curriculum that builds upon the school's unique location, while introducing pupils to places that differ greatly from those that are familiar. For example, the strong farming heritage in the area has formed the basis for lessons about the geography of the local landscape, while pupils have also had opportunities to visit large, multicultural cities such as London and Manchester. However, assessment of pupils' progress across subjects in the wider curriculum is at too early a stage to have had an impact on their outcomes.
- Effective provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) means that pupils with SEND generally make strong progress from their individual starting points. Leaders have secured good partnerships with other agencies, so that pupils receive the support they need. However, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are sometimes too low. When this happens, some pupils with SEND do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Leaders and governors make effective use of the pupil premium grant to ensure that disadvantaged pupils have the support they need to make progress. Leaders and governors also make good use of the physical education and sport premium to encourage pupils to participate in sport and to adopt healthy lifestyles. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the range of sporting activities on offer and they enjoy competing with other schools locally.

## Governance of the school

- Governors are highly committed and are fully supportive of leaders' aims to improve the school. New governors, including the chair, have brought a valuable range of expertise to the governing body. They have welcomed the timely support offered by the local authority and have devised clear plans for improving their effectiveness. The implementation of these plans is at an early stage.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, because leaders have made sure they have the right information. However, governors do not ask enough of the kinds of challenging questions about leaders' progress towards their priorities for improvement. Consequently, they do not yet hold leaders fully to account for pupils' outcomes.
- Governors know their local area extremely well, and have used this knowledge to build strong links for the school. For example, governors have worked with leaders to introduce a weekly 'community lunch', where pupils can learn more about the lives and needs of older members of their community while enjoying lunch together. These links are having a positive impact on pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and governors have successfully established a culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders make sure that all staff are well trained to recognise the signs of abuse and to take the right actions in order to keep pupils safe from harm.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school, and their parents support this view. Pupils speak with confidence about how to keep themselves safe online and know who to go to if they need help or are worried.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- Teachers generally plan learning that engages pupils' interests, so that most of the time they listen attentively and focus well. Teachers' clear expectations usually help pupils to settle quickly to learning because they understand what they have to do. Sometimes, however, pupils lose focus and are less attentive, because teaching does not challenge them sufficiently. Where this happens, time for learning is lost and pupils make less progress.
- Teachers usually allow time in lessons for pupils to review their learning and to consolidate their skills and knowledge. For example, in a mathematics lesson in key stage 1, pupils used their learning about coins to work out different ways of arriving at the same amounts of money. However, sometimes the tasks that pupils are set do not prompt them to think for themselves or to deepen their understanding in ways that would help them to make stronger progress.
- Where teachers' subject knowledge is secure, they use questioning more skilfully to probe pupils' understanding and to help them enhance their work. For example, in a literacy lesson in key stage 2, the teacher's questions helped pupils to recall their

recent work on using better punctuation. This enabled them to apply their knowledge to their writing to make it more interesting to read. Where teachers' subject knowledge is less secure, they do not use questioning as effectively to check pupils' understanding or to identify their misconceptions. When this happens, pupils make mistakes because their skills are not secure.

- Work in pupils' books across a range of subjects shows that there is variability in the extent to which tasks offer pupils the challenge they need to help them achieve well. Some tasks are too simple or repetitive. For example, pupils have too few opportunities to solve problems or to learn from their mistakes in mathematics. Some tasks do not offer pupils enough scope to practise their reading and writing skills across a range of subjects. This has a negative impact on the progress that pupils make, especially the most able.
- The teaching of phonics in the early years and in key stage 1 follows the school's agreed approach. Children respond to the familiar actions, songs and cues to remember the new sounds that they learn. However, the learning that teachers plan sometimes does not provide enough opportunities for all pupils to demonstrate what they have actually understood. For example, some more confident pupils are allowed to dominate contributions and answers to questions, preventing less confident pupils from doing so. Children's mistakes or misunderstandings are not always identified, and they make less progress.
- Teachers usually provide feedback to pupils in line with the school's assessment policy. Pupils, especially older pupils, understand what this feedback means and say that it helps them to improve their work. Parents welcome the information that teachers provide about their child's progress.
- Teachers provide pupils with homework in line with the school's policy. Most parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were supportive of the amount of homework that their child receives.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Requires improvement**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders have successfully created a warm, welcoming and happy environment for pupils. Parents speak highly of the school's caring ethos and are full of praise for the support their children receive.
- Pupils are confident and self-assured. Older pupils learn to take responsibility, for example by supporting younger children, or by being members of the school council. Pupils who join the school part way through the year settle in quickly because the relationships that they build with teachers and staff are secure.
- Leaders have established effective working practices with a range of agencies to ensure that pupils' welfare needs are met. They use resources well to ensure that pupils and their families get appropriate help where they need it, and that necessary information is shared promptly.
- Pupils have opportunities to take part in a wide range of extra-curricular and sporting

activities that help them to develop personally. Leaders provide important opportunities for pupils to learn more about diversity within families and in the wider world. Pupils speak confidently about their understanding of differences and similarities between people. Leaders and teachers lead pupils by example through their active promotion of equal opportunities and their strong commitment to challenging stereotypes and derogatory language.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- For most of the time, pupils' behaviour in class is good. They display positive attitudes to learning. Sometimes, however, their attention wanders and they become inattentive. At times, pupils talk while the teacher is talking, and they do not listen carefully. This is usually because the teaching does not sufficiently engage or challenge them. On occasions, teachers do not respond quickly enough to these behaviours and learning slows down as a result.
- Pupils generally conduct themselves well around school, including at lunchtimes and at outdoor playtimes. They are polite and courteous to adults and to visitors to the school.
- Leaders and governors have taken effective action to improve attendance since the last inspection. A number of initiatives, including the provision of day care before school together with the school's own transport facility, enable most pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with SEND, to attend school regularly. Attendance is now broadly in line with the national average as a result. The school continues to work hard with the few pupils and families whose persistent absence continues to cause concern.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- The very small cohorts of pupils in each year group means that the proportion represented by one pupil can vary considerably from year to year. The numbers of pupils joining the school at different points in the year or part way through key stages are also proportionately higher than average. Statistics about pupils' outcomes can therefore show wide variation, and comparison with other schools nationally can be unreliable. However, information published in recent years shows that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, at Thwaites School generally achieve better outcomes in reading than in writing and mathematics by the time they leave Year 6.
- Across all year groups, disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND who are currently in school make similar progress in reading, writing and mathematics to that of other pupils with similar starting points.
- The results of the national key stage 2 tests in 2018 show that pupils in Year 6 made average progress in reading. Pupils currently in school read with enthusiasm and enjoyment. They use their phonic skills well to break down unfamiliar words and are developing good comprehension skills. Leaders have provided pupils with attractive, well-stocked libraries and pupils enjoy selecting books to read in school and at home. As a result, pupils across the school are making strong progress in reading.

- Pupils in Year 6 in 2018 made progress in writing that was well below average, taking into account their individual starting points. Information from the school’s assessments and from the books of pupils currently in key stages 1 and 2 shows that expectations of what some pupils can achieve are too low. Pupils, including the most able, are not sufficiently challenged to enable them to make the progress of which they are capable. They have too few opportunities to practise and improve their writing across a range of subjects and when they do, the tasks they are given frequently limit what is expected of them. Consequently, pupils’ outcomes in writing require improvement.
- Published information shows that pupils in Year 6 in 2018 made progress in mathematics that was well below average. It is too early to see the impact on current pupils’ outcomes of leaders’ recent improvements to the teaching of mathematics. Pupils have too few opportunities to develop strong problem-solving and reasoning skills and to practise their mathematical skills across a range of subjects. In particular, the most able pupils in both key stages do not routinely make the progress of which they are capable, because they do not receive work that stretches them sufficiently. Outcomes in mathematics therefore require improvement.
- The very small cohorts of pupils make it difficult to make meaningful comparisons from one year to the next in the Year 1 national phonics screening check. However, published information shows that, in 2018, the proportion of pupils in Year 1 reaching the expected standard was below the national average overall. Although most pupils currently in early years and key stage 1 are making progress in their phonics skills, opportunities to check their understanding are sometimes missed.
- Pupils in the Year 6 national tests in 2018 achieved standards in science that were broadly similar to the national average. The good links that leaders have established with local companies provide opportunities for pupils to learn about science and technology from visiting professionals. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Years 5 and 6 engaged enthusiastically in their learning about how to program robots. Work in pupils’ books, however, shows that some science teaching does not provide pupils, especially the most able, with the challenge that they need to make stronger progress.
- Leaders and teachers ensure that pupils have opportunities to learn across a wide range of subjects including French, history, geography and art. Work in pupils’ books shows that too much of the learning that teachers provide limits what is expected of pupils. The most able pupils in particular are not provided with learning that challenges them or deepens their understanding further. Assessment of pupils’ progress in wider curriculum subjects is at an earlier stage than in reading, writing and mathematics.

### Early years provision

### Requires improvement

- Teachers’ and adults’ expectations of what children can achieve are sometimes too low, especially in the development of their early writing skills. This means that some learning demands very little from children and leaves little for them to do beyond following simple instructions. Children have too few opportunities to see adults modelling writing, for example during their phonics activities. This means that some children lack confidence at ‘having a go’ by themselves, and the progress that they make in writing is limited when this happens.

- Some of the learning activities that adults provide, especially indoors, do not routinely challenge children to learn more, for example, by trying things out for themselves. Some teaching uses questioning less skilfully and does not allow children the time they need to share their thoughts and ideas. This limits the opportunities that adults have to assess exactly what children have understood.
- The small numbers of children starting in the early years provision settle quickly into life at Thwaites School, because teachers and adults help them to feel safe and secure. They separate readily from their parents and carers and soon start to make progress in their personal, social and emotional development. Parents who spoke to the inspector were very appreciative of the good communication between home and school, and of the information that they receive about their child's development.
- Children have access to a good range of resources indoors and outdoors. Leaders have responded to the area for improvement from the last inspection and have enhanced the provision for children's learning outdoors. This provides children with a wider range of opportunities to engage in meaningful learning outside. For example, during the inspection, children enjoyed gathering natural materials from the environment and experimenting to see how they were carried along in the flow of water in the outdoor water feature.
- Children generally behave well in the early years because adults have established simple, clear rules and routines for them to follow. They know where to find the resources they need, where to put their coats and how to tidy away after themselves. Sometimes, adults do not make their expectations clear enough regarding when it is children's turn to speak, and when they should listen carefully. When this happens, less confident children have fewer opportunities to contribute and to practise their developing language skills.
- Leaders and staff have established effective working relationships with another local nursery. This provides staff with useful opportunities to see and share good practice and to develop professionally with other early years practitioners.
- The early years environment is a safe and happy place for children to learn and grow. Arrangements for safeguarding are effective because they are aligned with those across the school. No breaches of the safeguarding and welfare requirements were evident during the inspection.



## School details

Unique reference number	112166
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10082081

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	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ged McGrath
Headteacher	Jane Patton Michelle Sharpe
Telephone number	01229 772554
Website	<a href="http://www.thwaites.cumbria.sch.uk">www.thwaites.cumbria.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@thwaites.cumbria.sch.uk">admin@thwaites.cumbria.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	10–11 March 2015

## Information about this school

- Thwaites School is a primary school of much smaller size than average.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is much smaller than average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than average.
- The proportion of pupils receiving support for SEND is higher than average.
- The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is higher than average.
- Since the last inspection, the arrangements for the school's leadership have changed. Leadership is now shared on a part-time basis between the headteacher and a co-headteacher. The role of co-headteacher is currently being covered by an experienced

seconded leader from another local school, during the absence of the substantive postholder.

- The school has a part-time nursery class for children aged from three to four years old.
- The school runs before- and after-school day care for pupils whose parents require it.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning in all classes.
- The inspector looked at pupils' work across year groups and across a range of subjects.
- The inspector listened to some pupils reading, and observed pupils' behaviour in classes and around the school.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, governors, teachers, staff and pupils. The inspector also spoke to a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector looked at a range of documents, including the school's plans for improvement, safeguarding and recruitment information, behaviour logs, assessment information and minutes of governing body meetings.
- The inspector spoke to some parents and took into account 14 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. The inspector also took into account five responses to the pupil questionnaire and six responses to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Mavis Smith, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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