

Thorns Primary School

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

Inspection dates

11–12 June 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	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Attainment at the end of key stage 2 is well below the national average. Progress in reading across key stage 2 remains well below the national average.
- Disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils do not achieve as well as they should across the school.
- Leaders' skills of checking and monitoring the impact of improvements on pupils' progress are at an early stage of development.
- The quality and use of assessment are not yet good enough across the school.
- Some teachers do not challenge pupils well enough to ensure that they make good progress. Teaching is not always matched to what pupils can do and need to do next.
- A lot of changes have happened to the curriculum in a short space of time. Not all teachers have sufficient subject knowledge in all areas of the curriculum.
- Pupils' reading and mathematics skills are not well developed enough. Some pupils struggle to understand what they have read. Gaps in pupils' basic mathematics skills are not always being addressed.
- Too few children reach a good level of development in the early years and are insufficiently prepared for Year 1.
- Governors have not tracked the use of pupil premium funding with sufficient rigour.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher, appointed in September 2018, has set a purposeful direction for improvement. Staff, pupils and parents say behaviour has improved.
- Leaders support vulnerable pupils well.
- Pupils are polite and confident and proud to be part of their school.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about the wide range of sporting opportunities provided by the school.
- Pupils feel safe and secure in school. Safeguarding procedures are effective.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - improving how leaders check the quality of teaching and learning and give feedback to staff
 - developing middle leadership roles with clear areas of responsibility and accountability
 - ensuring that governors monitor the use and impact of pupil premium funding on the progress and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils
 - improving teachers' subject knowledge across the curriculum.
- Improve outcomes in reading and mathematics by ensuring that:
 - the teaching of reading comprehension helps pupils to better understand what they are reading
 - basic skills in mathematics are taught well
 - staff have higher expectations of what pupils can do and achieve in reading and mathematics, based on accurate assessments.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that teachers:
 - plan learning which meets the needs of all pupils and builds on what they already know and are able to do
 - improve the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils.
- Improve outcomes in the early years, especially for disadvantaged children, by ensuring that:
 - all activities develop and extend children's skills and learning
 - home reading books challenge pupils and match their level of phonics' knowledge
 - adults have high expectations of behaviour and engage the children actively in learning.

An external review of governance and the school's use of pupil premium should be carried out to see how these aspects of leadership and management could be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, inconsistencies in leadership and weaknesses in teaching and assessment have affected standards.
- The new headteacher, in post since September 2018, is rapidly addressing weaknesses in teaching and leadership. The headteacher and deputy headteacher understand the current strengths and weaknesses in teaching and are determined to make changes to improve it. However, inconsistencies in teaching remain.
- Changes to the middle leadership in the school mean that these roles are new to staff. Some leaders are experienced and understand their new roles and purpose.
- Leaders' checks on teaching do not always inform teachers clearly enough about what they are doing well and what they need to improve. This is slowing the pace of improving teaching.
- The headteacher has identified that teachers' assessments of pupils' progress are not always accurate or consistent. Teachers are not always confident about their assessments because they have not received sufficient training or support. The headteacher is improving the school's systems for assessment and is monitoring current cohorts of pupils with improved focus. However, gaps in learning and weaker teaching are affecting the progress pupils make across key stage 2 in reading and mathematics.
- The headteacher, together with a new middle leader, appointed in April 2019, are ensuring that the curriculum is broader and more balanced. Pupils spoke about their enjoyment of new topics. For example, pupils in Year 5 linked their learning about ancient civilisations to current topical issues. Pupils wrote about what they would do if they were Prime Minister. Their work on understanding the effect of single-use plastics comes through strongly in what they would change and the effect this would have on local wildlife and rivers. Pupils are being given the opportunity to practise their written and spoken skills in different subjects.
- Weak subject knowledge is affecting the quality of teaching in some areas of the curriculum, most notably in French and music. However, pupils sing with confidence and enjoyment. They are proud of the achievements of their choir in local competitions.
- Pupils enjoy physical education (PE) and the school is making good use of the additional sport premium funding to develop teachers' skills. Pupils also value the range of after-school activities on offer, including fencing, football, dance, dinosaur and cookery clubs.
- Pupils have a confident understanding about the differences and similarities of different religions. They show respect and tolerance for others. The improving curriculum is providing greater breadth of experiences for children. Each year group makes an educational visit off site. The pupils, who have worked with the local Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country to consider the introduction of salmon to the river Stour, have benefited from debating local issues. This is enhancing their cultural knowledge and understanding of the local area. Pupils' knowledge of British values has

developed since the last inspection. Pupils show care for those in their local community by fundraising for the Air Ambulance and other local charities. Leaders support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well in school.

- Funding is used well to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Programmes of intervention are effective for pupils, particularly in Years 5 and 6. The deputy headteacher has rapidly identified where improvements for pupils with SEND are needed. Leaders track the progress pupils with SEND are making. As a result, work in books shows that most pupils with SEND are making strong progress towards their individual targets.
- The majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, have a positive view of the school. Parents recognise that there have been a lot of changes in a short space of time. Parents say their children are happy and safe in school, that behaviour is improving and pastoral care is strong. Some parents have found that the changes of staffing in classes are affecting their children's enjoyment of school and their progress. Parents are keen to be involved in the life of the school. The Eid assembly during the inspection was well attended by parents.

Governance of the school

- The quality of governance requires improvement.
- Governors do not explore in detail the impact pupil premium funding is having on disadvantaged pupils. Governors have accepted, too readily, information about pupil premium funding spending.
- Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of teaching in the school.
- Minutes of meetings show that governors are beginning to hold leaders to account with greater rigour.
- Several governors have changed since the last inspection and there are a number of vacancies on the governing body. Currently one third of governor roles are vacant. The chair of governors is keen to recruit new governors with the skills to support and challenge the new headteacher to improve the quality of education for pupils.
- Governors access regular training. They ensure that their safeguarding duties are fulfilled.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher are developing a strong culture of keeping children safe. Training for safeguarding leaders and staff is up to date. Staff know what to do if they have concerns. Leaders are prompt in their follow up with external agencies. Records are maintained with care and stored securely. Improved systems for pre-employment checks to ensure that staff are fit to work with children are in place. Checks are carried out on all volunteers and visitors.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is not good enough across the school. Teachers sometimes do not engage pupils in learning or challenge them sufficiently. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their learning and their progress is limited. In many lessons the most able pupils are not challenged enough. This affects their progress across key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- Teachers do not always expect enough of all pupils and some disengage in lessons. Their passivity affects the quality of their work, the amount they complete and impedes their progress.
- Developing the teaching of reading is a whole-school priority. Senior leaders are making changes to the quality of books pupils read and pupils are developing their enjoyment of reading through these new books. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of the changes on pupils' reading comprehension skills. Adults working with them do not always check pupils' skills of understanding new vocabulary and comprehension. When reading, some pupils guess or overly rely on adults to assist and tell them. Staff do not methodically check the reading skills of pupils. As a result, not all pupils are making the progress they should in reading across key stage 2.
- Phonics is taught well. At the end of Year 1 many pupils reach the expected standard. Pupils enjoy learning phonics; they are keen and make strong progress in lessons. Pupils use their phonics knowledge well in their early writing in key stage 1.
- In lessons, and when planning for learning, teachers do not always use what they know about the pupils to plan next steps. For example, mathematics books show that pupils are not always able to understand the problems set because the basic skills of calculations are not taught effectively. Books show that some pupils are moved on too quickly before they have understood new learning in mathematics. Teachers' weak subject knowledge is affecting the teaching of mathematics in some classes. Work in some books is marked incorrectly; this is resulting in misconceptions in basic skills for pupils. Where mathematics is taught well, teachers model new learning and pupils are confident about what they are being asked to do.
- Pupils' books show that improvements to the teaching of writing are having an impact on the quality of their writing. For example, in Year 5 teachers used the 'Rain Player' to develop a love of reading and purpose for writing. Pupils applied their knowledge of spelling patterns and grammar when writing speeches, pretending to be a character in the book.
- Some teachers do not use assessment information accurately enough to build on what pupils know and what they need to do next. The assessment of pupils is not consistent because teachers' skills in routinely addressing misconceptions or weaknesses in basic skills are not a part of everyday teaching.
- Additional staff, when used well, are making good contributions to pupils' learning. Pupils with SEND are supported well in lessons by teaching assistants. However, there are times when pupils struggle to understand a task, for example when reading a whole-class novel because the text is too difficult for them. This slows their progress in lessons.

- Relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is managed well.
- Recent changes to the setting of homework have had a mixed response from pupils and parents. Some parents report that the curriculum information on the school's website and reduction in the amount of homework has left them unclear about what their children are learning and the progress they are making. Of those parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, two thirds said their child receives an appropriate amount of homework for their age.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are proud of their school and of their achievements. Displays around the school celebrate and recognise the talents of individuals and teams of pupils.
- Pupils know how to keep safe and say they feel safe in school. They have a good understanding about online safety. Good use is made of local amenities to help pupils understand how to travel safely on trains and stay safe on the River Stour.
- Pupils are knowledgeable about different forms of bullying. They say incidents do happen in school but they are rare and they are dealt with effectively by staff. The school maintains detailed records of incidents and how these are followed up.
- A breakfast club provided by the school is a time where older and younger children play together. Parents say they appreciate the flexibility of being able to book a place on the day. Pupils socialise well together, playing a range of different sports before they share breakfast together.
- Staff encourage pupils to make healthy choices for their breaktime snacks and at lunchtimes. Pupils say the changes to the snacks they are allowed are helping them to think carefully about what they eat.
- Pupils are encouraged to work in teams, in sporting events in school and in inter-school sports competitions. Pupils talk confidently about how they keep healthy through keeping fit and playing sport.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils say the new headteacher has made a lot of changes to behaviour in school. Pupils know what the expectations are for behaviour and display good manners.
- Pupils are welcoming to visitors. They move sensibly around the school, showing maturity.
- Attendance is broadly in line with the national average for all pupils. The family support worker works closely with families to help improve attendance and punctuality. First day calls, home visits, letters to parents and referrals to support families, along with fixed-penalty notices for leave in term time, are all used to support improving

attendance. Leaders celebrate good attendance through assemblies and raffles for pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- In 2018 attainment by the end of Year 6 was well below the national average. Since the last inspection progress in reading at the end of Year 6 has been well below the national average. Weaknesses in teaching and leaders not addressing areas for improvement rapidly enough in the past mean that not enough pupils make good progress across key stage 2.
- Attainment at the end of key stage 1 was average in 2018. The number of pupils achieving the expected level in the Year 1 phonics check is in line with the national average.
- The headteacher is addressing inherent weaknesses in the assessment of pupil's work in school. Staff do not always have high enough expectations of what pupils should achieve in different year groups. Work in books shows that in some year groups pupils are not reaching the standards they are capable of. This is because teachers do not plan their lessons based on what pupils already know and what they need to do next, particularly in mathematics and in reading.
- Pupils in Year 6 are making greater gains. Work in their books shows that pupils are completing work that is at the expected standard for their age. The most able pupils are being challenged in Year 6.
- Improvements in the education for pupils with SEND mean they are making better progress. Additional adults in class support pupils with SEND well. However, sometimes the tasks set are too challenging, for example when pupils cannot understand the whole-class reading book because the level of reading is too difficult.
- Leaders, in the past, have not prioritised sufficiently the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils has not been used to support them specifically. As a result, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is well below that of other pupils nationally. Teachers now know which pupils are disadvantaged and leaders are tracking their progress carefully.
- The small numbers of pupils who have English as an additional language make good progress by the end of Year 6. Staff provide support for the early acquisition of spoken English and outcomes show that the majority of pupils new to English are making good gains in learning over time.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- The leadership of early years requires improvement. Since the last inspection the proportion of children achieving a good level of development has dipped and it is well below the national average at the end of Reception. Children who are disadvantaged do not achieve as well as other children in Reception. Consequently, children are not prepared well enough for learning in Year 1.
- Leaders' and teachers' assessment of children is accurate. However, tasks set for the children often lack purpose and are not challenging enough. At times, staff do not

provide enough help for children and leave them undirected for too long. This results in children's learning and play lacking purpose, which limits their progress.

- Too few children reach a good level of development because the aspirations of staff are not high enough. Staff are not using assessment information well enough to plan engaging and challenging learning activities.
- Leaders recognise that outcomes for children in Reception need to improve. Leaders are working closely with a national leader in education. As this support has started recently, it is too early to measure the impact of this work in early years.
- Relationships between children and staff are warm. The children are encouraged to be kind to each other. They cooperate well together. For example, two boys keenly helped each other to get into their Power Rangers outfits. The children develop their skills of playing together in small groups through learning to take turns. Staff encourage children to listen to the ideas of others.
- Children use their phonics skills effectively in their reading. Phonics is taught well in Reception. Children show an enjoyment of books and are keen to read to adults. However, for some pupils the books are not sufficiently challenging. The home reading books are not always matched precisely enough to the children's skills in phonics. This is holding some children back in their progress as young readers, particularly the most able.
- Positive partnerships with pre-school settings help to ensure that children have a smooth transition into the Reception class. Parents feel involved in their children's start at school. The Reception class is a caring start to their school life.

School details

Unique reference number	103787
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	10088472

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	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	198
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jane Price
Headteacher	Mrs Rebecca Jordan
Telephone number	01384 818 285
Website	www.thorns.sch.life
Email address	info@thorns-p.dudley.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–10 March 2017

Information about this school

- Thorns Primary School is a smaller-than-average-sized primary school.
- Around three quarters of the pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is just above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above the national average. The number of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is below the national average.
- The headteacher joined the school in September 2018. A new curriculum leader was internally promoted from April 2019.
- A breakfast club, managed by the school, is provided for pupils.
- The school receives support from a school improvement partner and a national leader of education.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all classes. Lesson observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors met with a group of pupils, listened to pupils read and observed pupils at breaktime and lunchtime.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' books from different year groups and different subjects.
- Inspectors took account of the 21 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 12 free-text responses. Inspectors spoke to parents in the playground and the lead inspector spoke to one parent on the telephone.
- Inspectors reviewed the 25 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and the 73 responses to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, minutes of governors' meetings, the use of additional funding, behaviour records, attendance and safeguarding documents. Inspectors considered leaders' information about pupils' progress and teaching and learning.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, middle leaders and staff with responsibility for the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. The lead inspector met with members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.

Inspection team

Pamela Matty, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Michael Appleby

Ofsted Inspector

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