

Inspection of a good school: Thornhill Primary School

Grove Road, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 5PE

Inspection dates:

26–27 November 2019

Outcome

Thornhill Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils told me that they enjoy being at Thornhill Primary School. They like their teachers, enjoy learning and feel safe.

Teachers have high expectations of behaviour and learning. Pupils respond to these well. Pupils, including the youngest children, quickly learn how they should behave towards others. In lessons pupils work hard. They keep trying hard even if they find something difficult. Pupils listen carefully to adults and their classmates. They work well with others or independently.

Thornhill is a friendly school. New pupils are made to feel welcome and part of the community. Pupils are polite and courteous to each other, adults and visitors. They told me that it is 'okay to be different' at the school. Pupils like to learn about different countries and cultures, including those that others in the school come from. Pupils say that there is little bullying or unkindness at the school. They know that if they do have any problems that staff will sort these out quickly.

Pupils enjoy the range of activities that take place after school on Tuesdays. They also value the trips that take place. They say these make their learning more interesting and show them new things.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Pupils learn about all the subjects in the national curriculum. Leaders have thought carefully about what they want pupils to learn in each subject and the order in which each topic is taught. Sometimes it is not clear how learning builds from one year to the next. Consequently, teachers do not always build on pupils' previous learning as quickly as they could. However, by the time pupils leave at the end of Year 6 they have a good foundation for learning at secondary school.

In the early years, adults plan activities to build on children's interests and curiosity.

Adults model how to speak and work with others well. Children play and learn well together. There are many opportunities for children to develop skills in early reading, writing and mathematics. Children are prepared well for learning in Year 1.

Leaders give great importance to teaching the skills of reading. Staff know a lot about how pupils learn to read. They teach phonics well. Pupils read books that are well-matched to the phonics that they know. Staff identify pupils who need extra help quickly and help them to catch up. More pupils are becoming confident, fluent readers because of this work. They achieve well by the end of Year 6.

Pupils told me how teachers encourage them to read at home. Most pupils enjoy reading. However, some pupils do not develop a deeper understanding of what they read. Teachers are helping pupils learn ways to do this. They are introducing pupils to a wider range of vocabulary. There are early signs that this is making a positive difference, but it is too early to see if this is making enough difference to those pupils.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge in mathematics. They explain things well and quickly pick up on misunderstandings. Pupils like the way teachers recap important knowledge. For example, opportunities to practise calculation methods and multiplication tables help pupils to become confident in using mathematics. Pupils' achievement in mathematics is improving.

The school meets the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well. Leaders identify where pupils need extra help and ensure that this help is effective. Pupils with SEND take part in the full range of learning activities. Most become more confident and independent learners.

Teachers ensure that the curriculum supports pupils' personal development. For example, I saw Year 5 pupils talking about democracy in ancient Greece. In a Year 4 English lesson, pupils spoke thoughtfully about whether you should change to fit in with others. After-school clubs allow pupils to follow their interests. Pupils like the responsibilities they have, which range from class monitors to members of the school council.

Leaders have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attendance. Pupils rarely repeat the wrong choices about behaviour or disturb learning. Leaders reward good attendance. They provide support to the families of pupils with poor attendance. Where attendance does not improve leaders take appropriate action. Despite this work, the number of pupils who are frequently absent, particularly disadvantaged pupils, is too high.

Leaders and governors know what the school does well and what still needs to improve. Their high ambitions for pupils and staff are clear. Staff feel valued and well led. They share leaders' high aspirations for the school and its pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and governors give keeping pupils safe the highest priority. They ensure that the

most vulnerable pupils and their families quickly get any help that they need. Leaders provide and access additional support at an early stage. This prevents concerns becoming more serious. Staff know how to recognise signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. They are confident to report concerns and know that leaders act promptly. Leaders' checks to ensure that adults are suitable to work in schools are thorough. Leaders and governors ensure that the record of these checks is accurately maintained.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils develop the skills they need to decode text and read fluently. Pupils' ability to infer meaning from text is less well developed. This is a barrier to raising pupils' achievement further. Leaders should ensure that pupils develop strategies to infer meaning from text. Leaders should evaluate whether the actions they have already taken to do this are making the difference intended.
- Subject plans logically sequence learning so that pupils develop knowledge across the range of subjects. However, other than literacy and mathematics, links to previous learning are not always explicit. Teachers do not always effectively build on what pupils have learned previously unless they have taught in other year groups or looked at plans for other year groups. Leaders need to ensure that all subject plans equally take account of pupils' prior learning to support teachers' planning.
- Systems to monitor absence are used to support and challenge parents whose children are frequently absent. Attendance overall and for many pupils with previously low attendance has improved. However, persistent absence is still too high, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders should use their analysis of absence information and the use of additional funding to further refine their strategies to reduce persistent absence.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 26–27 May 2011.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	109504
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10110305
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	225
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Claire McDonald
Headteacher	Julia Lawson
Website	www.thornhill-primary.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	15 March 2016

Information about this school

- Most teachers have joined the school since the previous section 8 inspection in 2016.
- Just over half of the pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average and increasing.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average. The proportion of pupils with SEND but who do not have an education, health and care plan is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who join the school at times other than the start of the school year is higher than in most primary schools.

Information about this inspection

- I met with the headteacher and senior leaders, the special needs coordinator and two members of the governing body. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- To evaluate the quality of education, I carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and science. In each subject, I visited lessons in all key stages, scrutinised pupils' work (this included listening to pupils read), and held discussions with subject leaders, teachers and pupils. I also reviewed curriculum plans in a range of other subjects and made short visits to lessons to see pupils learning a range of

subjects.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, I reviewed a range of documentation including school policies, procedures and records. I met with the designated leader for safeguarding and the headteacher to discuss their work and review examples of the actions taken to keep pupils safe. I also checked staff members' understanding of how to keep pupils safe from harm.
- I gathered pupils' views on the school by speaking to groups of pupils from the lessons that I had visited, speaking to pupils in their lessons and speaking to pupils at informal times, such as lunchtime and before school. There were no responses to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire. I considered 155 responses to printed copies of the Ofsted pupil questionnaire and the 190 responses to the most recent pupil survey carried out by the school.
- I reviewed the 12 responses and free-text comments submitted by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also spoke to parents before school on the first day of the inspection and took account of 57 responses to a survey of parents carried out by the school.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online staff survey. I reviewed 17 written responses to the Ofsted questionnaire that staff passed to me. I also met with a group of teaching assistants and gathered staff views when meeting with teachers following lesson visits and when scrutinising pupils' work.

Inspection team

Paul Wilson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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