

Inspection of a good school: Thaxted Primary School

Bardfield Road, Thaxted, Dunmow, Essex CM6 2LW

Inspection dates:

2 and 3 February 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Thaxted Primary School are keen to show the '6R' values: respect, responsibility, reasoning, reflectiveness, resourcefulness and resilience.

Pupils show respect with their wonderful manners, talking politely to others. Pupils take on responsibility through volunteering. For example, pupil librarians oversee the loan and return of books, and they work hard to keep the library in good order. At lunchtimes, caring staff and 'lunchtime buddies' facilitate fun activities. Leaders even arrange a 'play club' for pupils who find lunchtimes a little overwhelming. Being in a school where everyone is kind makes it a happy place for pupils.

Though it happens rarely, pupils appreciate leaders' support to reflect on incidents of unkindness, including bullying. This ensures that pupils get help and prevents incidents from reoccurring. Because they are resourceful, pupils know how to seek support from trusted adults. As such, pupils remain safe.

Pupils show resilience when competing in inter-school competitions. These include activities that test academic ability and sporting prowess.

Some pupils can connect what they learn at home to what they learn in school, using reflection and reasoning. They use this knowledge to succeed in lessons. Other pupils lack this ability. Teachers' planning for learning does not account for this. Consequently, not all pupils are prepared for success.

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

The recently appointed headteacher is ambitious for the school, evaluating its strengths and weaknesses accurately and prioritising improvements shrewdly. Doing so means that governors now have a clear understanding of change needed to move the school forward. There are examples of these changes already working well. For example, improvements to safeguarding mean systems are clear and staff are suitably trained.

Leaders are currently reviewing the curriculum. Though it is in review, what is set out in documentation is suitably specific. It includes the words and concepts leaders want pupils to learn. Pupils generally achieve well at this school. However, leaders, including governors, agree that shortcomings in implementing the intended curriculum mean that pupils could achieve more.

Typically, pupils learn to read. However, for weaker readers, the extra support they receive in school does not work as well as it could. This is because the books they receive do not always match the sounds they know. Staff who support pupils lack training. This shows in different ways. Staff do not always pick up on pupils' poor pronunciation of sounds. Some staff set comprehension-check questions that rely on illustrations rather than text. As a result, pupils fall behind.

Teachers are well meaning, but their planning for learning does not bring out the best in all pupils. Their approaches only work well for those pupils who can infer meaning and whose memory is strong. For example, teachers sometimes play videos to explain concepts without telling pupils what observations to make or the questions to consider. Where this happens, some pupils struggle to make observations or to volunteer answers to questions during the follow-up discussion. Pupils most affected tend to be from disadvantaged backgrounds or pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Consequently, they find it difficult to remember what leaders want them to know.

Some curriculum leaders do not have the expertise they need to lead their subjects effectively. They provide vague suggestions to teachers rather than specific guidance to apply in lessons. For example, curriculum leaders identified that some pupils found problem solving in mathematics hard. However, staff training did not focus on the principles of how to teach this. Therefore, the same pupils continue to struggle in this area.

Leaders work with staff and parents to identify pupils with SEND. Parents appreciate the care and attention their children receive. Leaders also seek guidance from external agencies. Colleagues from these agencies visit school to upskill staff in how best to meet pupils' needs. However, pupils with SEND still experience the same variable quality in how staff deliver the curriculum.

Across the school, pupils behave courteously. However, pupils' politeness can mask their needs in lessons. This explains why some teachers struggle to spot pupils who find the work too easy or pupils who need greater support to access learning in class.

Leaders maintain strong links with the community. Pupils, parents and staff all agree that these links really add to pupils' wider development. They include opportunities to take

part in well-known festivals, such as creating artwork to enter a prizegiving event. Pupils also have opportunities for local visits, including to the church to perform plays or a farm to complement the science and geography curriculums.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders revitalised staff training and recording systems. Alongside detailed training, there are complementary briefings. These help staff to remember key points. Consequently, staff are vigilant of pupils at risk of harm. Staff report concerns, no matter how small. In this way, they live out leaders' ethos of 'it could happen here'. Leaders act swiftly to secure support for vulnerable pupils, liaising with external agencies. Pupils know the channels for raising concerns, including how to note them on a 'worry cloud' so they can talk in private to a trusted adult. Governors check safeguarding systems carefully, including the pre-employment checks for staff and volunteers.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Staff lack expertise in how best to support pupils to read at an early stage of learning. As a result, there are pupils who struggle to read the books they receive and for whom the support to catch up does not work well enough. Leaders should arrange training for staff that improves their teaching in lessons and during catch-up support. Leaders should also ensure the books pupils receive match the sounds they know, ensuring they support pupils to read accurately and fluently.
- Teachers lack consistency in how well they present subject content, how efficiently they check pupils' understanding and how they ensure pupils receive guidance that allows them all to complete activities confidently and well. Subsequently, some pupils have gaps in their understanding of what they should know. Leaders should provide further training to ensure that teachers understand how to plan and adapt their teaching effectively so that all pupils are prepared for success.
- Some leaders lack expertise in how to evaluate the quality of provision and identify priorities for improvement, and they are unsure of how to address these issues through timely actions that make a positive difference. Consequently, there are variations in the quality of education, including in the early years. These leaders should receive suitable training and support to help them to evaluate provision accurately so they identify and resolve weaknesses in the teaching of the curriculum.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually, this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in June 2013.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

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	115288
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10211347
Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	260
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	John Spencer
Headteacher	Caroline Crompton
Website	www.thaxted.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	2 February 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher and the chair of governors took up post in September 2022.
- The published admissions number is 38. Because of this, some pupils are in single-year classes, while others are in mixed-year classes.
- There is before- and after-school childcare for pupils attending the school. It is run by school staff and managed by school leaders.
- Currently, leaders do not use alternative provision for any pupils.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held meetings with leaders, including the headteacher, acting deputy headteacher, inclusion manager and pastoral care and well-being leader. The inspector spoke with five governors and a representative working for the local authority.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspector also listened to a sample of pupils read to a familiar adult.
- To inspect safeguarding, the inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and a deputy DSL to review records and met with the school business manager to examine the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. The inspector also spoke to governors, staff and pupils and reviewed surveys to further evaluate safeguarding.
- The inspector reviewed a range of other school documentation and policies, including curriculum documentation for art and design, history and religious education, the school development plan, and the minutes of governors' meetings.
- The inspector gathered pupils' views by observing and speaking to them. The inspector also took account of the 80 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- The inspector gathered parents' views by reviewing the 113 responses and 62 free-text responses submitted to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.
- The inspector gathered the views of staff by speaking to several of them and reviewing the 31 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Daniel Short, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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