

Inspection of a good school: Thornley Primary School

Cooper's Terrace, Thornley, Durham DH6 3DZ

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 January 2024

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. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Thornley Primary School is welcoming and nurturing. Pupils' welfare is at the heart of the school. Staff are passionate about pupils' well-being and wider development. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are fully included in lessons and other aspects of school life. Pupils, and their parents and carers, are proud to be part of this school community.

Recent changes implemented by the new leadership team are welcomed by parents and pupils. The school has reviewed and updated its curriculum offer for all pupils. These changes to the curriculum need more time to become embedded and have the intended impact on pupils' achievement.

Pupils behave well. They are polite and respectful towards staff. Pupils are motivated by the rewards systems in school. Parents appreciate the school-to-home communication systems in place. Bullying is rare. The school deals with any instances effectively. Staff take the time to develop positive relationships with families. Parents value the curriculum information sessions the school provides, together with opportunities to visit their children's lessons.

The attendance and punctuality of pupils are not strong enough. The school has introduced systems to improve both. At this point in the school year, they have not achieved the desired impact.

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

The school has experienced significant leadership changes in the last year. The new staff team has implemented new curriculums in all subjects. A change to the school's behaviour management approach has been introduced too. The school's communications

with parents are much improved. Better prioritisation and checking are required to embed these changes. Leaders recognise that pupils' attainment is not as it should be. The school has rearranged the school day to include regular catch-up and booster sessions. Pupils want to do well. These sessions are well attended. Gaps in pupils' prior knowledge are beginning to close.

The school is highly ambitious for all pupils. Leaders liaise closely with external partners to develop the curriculum in the early years. The school, correctly, has identified communication and language as a whole-school focus. In some subjects, pupils benefit from regular opportunities to develop their understanding of new vocabulary. In these subjects, pupils confidently discuss new learning. In some subjects, the school does not consistently know whether pupils remember the important knowledge that teachers intend. Also, the school does not identify pupils' misconceptions as a matter of course. As a result, pupils do not have a secure knowledge base on which to build new learning.

The school offers provision for two-year-olds. Children in the early years are happy. They quickly settle into the routines and expectations of the school. Children have regular opportunities to understand and talk about their feelings. Adults do not model or encourage the use of ambitious language routinely. Children benefit from parent stay-and-play sessions. Borrowing books from the early years library supports children's learning well. The frequency and quality of pupils' reading at home has improved this year. The school, again correctly, identifies the creation of a language-rich environment as a priority in the early years.

Reading is an important part of school life. The school has prioritised early reading and the development of reading skills for older pupils. Pupils now have daily reading skills lessons. This provision has improved pupils' comprehension and reading fluency. The school checks pupils' progress in reading regularly. Leaders have prioritised phonics in Reception and key stage 1. Most pupils learn to read quickly and confidently. Pupils that need more help to read fluently are given regular support. This helps them catch up quickly.

Leaders identify pupils with SEND early and accurately. Teachers know and understand pupils' needs well. Staff ensure that accurate support plans help pupils to be included and learn well. Pupils with SEND have access to the equipment they need in lessons. Staff use a range of strategies to ensure pupils with SEND are well supported to thrive in school.

The school goes to great lengths to ensure all children access educational visits and clubs. The costs of whole-school educational visits are covered through fundraising activities, such as sponsored events. The school provides a selection of free extra-curricular clubs and low-cost wraparound care. It also partners with regional charities to provide practical support to families that need it.

The school's systems to improve pupils' attendance are not effective enough. The culture of poor attendance and punctuality contributes to the poor outcomes achieved by pupils. The school recognises that attendance, including its work with pupils' families, must continue to be of the highest priority.

The school's curriculum for personal, social and health education develops pupils' confidence and understanding of identifying risks and staying safe. Pupils are taught about their rights and the importance of respecting others' individual differences. Pupils regularly say, 'treat others how you want to be treated'. The partnership with the local church provides opportunities for spiritual and moral development. Pupils are generally kind and respectful to each other.

Leaders, including those responsible for governance, know the school community well. Governors understand their statutory responsibilities. The staff team are committed to the improvement journey of the school. Leaders, overseeing rapid and widespread change, have not reflected thoroughly on the areas for development that need immediate and sustained attention. The school manages staff workload well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has made widespread changes in a short period of time. Some changes have not had enough development to become well established. Leaders should prioritise developments that will have the most impact on pupils' achievement.
- In some subjects, the school does not check to make sure that pupils learn and remember what they are taught. This means that misconceptions and gaps in pupils' knowledge are not addressed and filled. The school should refine its approach to assessment to ensure pupils' knowledge gaps are addressed.
- Some interactions in the early years do not develop children's communication and language knowledge as well as they could. Children are not provided with enough opportunities to rehearse and extend their language skills. The school should continue to focus on developing staff's expertise to provide high-quality interactions with children in the early years.
- Too many pupils do not attend regularly enough and/or are late for school too often. These pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. They fall behind their classmates. The school must develop their processes, including liaison with families, to improve pupils' attendance and punctuality.

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 December 2018.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	114146
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10313233
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	161
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Christine Varty
Headteacher	Anna Caine
Website	www.thornley.durham.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	7 December 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- A new headteacher took up post in September 2022.
- The school has provision for two-year-olds.
- The school provides a breakfast club and after-school childcare.
- The school does not currently use alternative education providers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- 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 spoke to senior leaders, including members of the governing body and the local authority's school improvement partner.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector held discussions about the curriculum,

visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- The inspector listened to a range of pupils read from different year groups.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first. The inspector also spoke to leaders, teachers, governors and pupils about safeguarding.
- The inspector analysed the responses to Ofsted's staff survey and reviewed the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses.

Inspection team

Georgina Chinaka, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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