



Thorns Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103787
Local Authority Dudley
Inspection number 286757
Inspection dates 20–21 September 2006
Reporting inspector David Carrington

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary	School address	Thorns Road
School category	Community		Quarry Bank
Age range of pupils	4–11		Brierley Hill DY5 2JY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01384 818285
Number on roll (school)	174	Fax number	01384 818286
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	G Cadwallander
		Headteacher	David Priestley
Date of previous school inspection	24 September 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Pupils at Thorns Primary School live in the residential area around the school, though a few travel further from home. An average number are entitled to free school meals. The number of pupils with learning difficulties is similar to that in most schools. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic groups. Hardly any pupils speak English as an additional language. Children start in Reception with standards below average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Thorns Primary School provides a satisfactory and improving education for its pupils. In the past, achievement had slipped in the junior years because of instability in staffing. This was particularly the case in mathematics and writing, and standards in these aspects were below average. Senior leaders have worked successfully to raise achievement and standards, which have improved over the last two years. They are now not far short of average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Standards in mathematics are better now, though those in writing are still not high enough. The school has improved the way writing is taught and pupils' achievement is accelerating. In general, boys do not achieve as well as girls, which is an issue the school is tracking carefully. The school has a number of strengths that stem from the good direction given by senior leaders and the governors. Leadership of the Foundation Stage is good and this enables the children to settle quickly and achieve well from their below average starting level. Children have particularly weak writing skills when they start and this influences the standards that they reach in later years. Nonetheless, they make good strides in Reception and they go on to Year 1 with confidence and enthusiasm. Pupils and parents are pleased they chose Thorns Primary School. They say that the staff and the warm friendly atmosphere are the two main strengths of the school. The pupils are polite and well behaved and they get on well with each other and the staff. The school ensures that all pupils are kept safe through its good procedures for care, guidance and support and pupils have good knowledge of healthy and safe lifestyles. The school has been particularly vigilant in its drugs education programme in response to problems of drug abuse in the neighbourhood. Many teachers are fairly new to the school and there is positive evidence to show that the quality of teaching is now better than it has been in the past, with some outstanding teaching in Year 6. There is a good programme of out of school activities, which all pupils, including children in Reception, join in with enthusiasm. There are good opportunities for pupils to be involved in the local community and they clearly enjoy taking on responsibilities such as being prefects and representing the other pupils on the school council. The school is working effectively to develop a more creative curriculum that will encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and develop good basic skills.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in writing by focusing on good handwriting, punctuation and spelling and by ensuring there are consistent opportunities to improve writing skills across the curriculum.
- Ensure that boys do as well as girls by providing work and resources that build on boys' interests and motivation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils achieve satisfactorily overall and standards are not far short of the expected level at the end of Year 6. Standards have fluctuated over recent years with some respectable results followed by a decline. Improvements in mathematics and writing have lagged behind those in other work and repeated staff absence has interrupted the learning of some pupils in the junior classes. Staffing is now stable and learning is proving much more consistent because there is an increasing amount of good teaching. This is impacting positively on achievement, which is accelerating. Teaching and the curriculum are not consistent in promoting boys' learning. As a result, boys do not concentrate as well as girls and some younger boys occasionally dominate the lesson. Senior leaders are keen to focus on boys' work in order to improve the overall level of achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school life and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They attribute this firmly to interesting lessons, and the good care they receive. Pupils feel safe because any incidents of bullying are dealt with well. They know how to remain safe and give examples of how they apply this in their everyday lives. Those who occasionally misbehave are skilfully managed and do not disrupt the learning of others. Pupils demonstrate good social skills, taking on responsibilities such as acting as prefects. Pupils have good ideas about healthy lifestyles, enjoy the healthy lunchtime menus and take advantage of the numerous sporting activities. Attendance has risen and is now close to average. Pupils are prepared soundly for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Following a period when some older pupils were taught by a number of different teachers, the school has entered a more settled staffing situation. There is now a mix of very new and more established teachers, and teaching quality is satisfactory. However, it is evident that there is a considerable amount of good quality teaching, and some that is outstanding, which should prove the basis for more consistent and improved learning across the school in the future. In a few lessons, the pace of learning is still a little slack, though generally pupils work soundly. Boys' interest is not always built upon successfully in lessons because the tasks are not matched consistently to their needs. This affects their concentration and ultimately, their achievement. In some infant classes, teachers do not always ensure that girls have the same opportunities to contribute to lessons as the boys, who are more lively and talkative.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is being developed effectively at present in order to ensure pupils' creativity, independence and responsibility for their own learning is improved. There is renewed focus on writing as the number one curriculum priority and this is already benefiting the quality of pupils' writing. However, the development of writing skills in subjects other than English is not consistent. Nonetheless, the school is preparing capably for changes to the literacy and numeracy strategies later this school year. The provision of activities outside school is good and is making a positive contribution to pupils' personal and social development. The school has not looked closely enough at whether activities within the curriculum are sufficiently boy friendly. It is though, aware that it needs to improve boys' achievement by ensuring that resources and tasks are appealing and maintain their concentration.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care and support provided for pupils is a strength of the school and is a major factor in promoting pupils' good personal development. Child protection procedures and risk assessments are securely in place and the school is vigilant in protecting vulnerable pupils. Systems for promoting effort and good behaviour prompt children to try hard, even those who find it difficult to behave. The family atmosphere of the school is appreciated by parents, who feel that their children are known and supported well by adults in school. Good support is given to pupils with learning difficulties which enables them to progress as well as other pupils. The school has introduced a good system to identify how much progress each pupil makes and to set targets for improvement. This gives teachers clear information about the next steps in learning, which is generally shared well with pupils. However, boys could be given more guidance about completing their work successfully in order to improve their achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. School leaders have introduced good procedures to check and evaluate its work and the school has sound capacity to continue its improvement. There has been a robust response to the recent decline in pupils' achievement. It is too early to evaluate fully the impact of all the improvement strategies and the new teaching team, though some success is already evident. Although there has been success in improving achievement in mathematics, the senior team recognises that there is clearly further to go. Senior leaders recognise the need to raise achievement for boys and also in writing. The headteacher and the recently formed senior team have set ambitious, but realistic, targets for pupils' achievement. They are supported well by a challenging and committed governing body. Governors have

managed the school's limited finances prudently, especially during recent building work, while continuing to focus on the school's key priorities. The school works well with parents and external agencies in order to ensure pupils' well-being.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

- Thank you for giving us a warm welcome when we visited your school recently. We were fascinated by the questions you asked us in assembly and found some of the questions difficult to answer. Many of you told us that you enjoy school and that you think your teachers are the best. In our report, we have included some good things about the school. The most important points we write about are:
 - Your education is satisfactory and is getting better.
 - Your results are improving, especially in mathematics.
 - Your lessons are taught soundly.
 - You are polite, get on well with each other and behave well.
 - Children in Reception settle quickly to their learning and do well.
 - All the adults in school take good care of you and keep you safe.
 - Your headteacher and other staff want you to do even better than you already do. We think there are two important improvements that can be made:
 - Your writing could be better, especially your handwriting, spelling and use of capital letters and full stops.
 - Work is not always interesting enough for boys and so they do not do as well as the girls. We are sure you will help your teachers make these improvements. You can start by always listening carefully and by making sure your writing is interesting and neat. You asked us lots of questions when we were with you, so try answering this one: Which countries do not use the alphabet for writing? There is a clue in the hall.