

Thorns Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103787
Local Authority	Dudley
Inspection number	336157
Inspection dates	27–28 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Declan McCauley

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	186
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Cadwallader
Headteacher	David Priestley
Date of previous school inspection	20 September 2006
School address	Thorns Road Quarry Bank Brierley Hill
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 16 lessons, and held meetings with three members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils and parents. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's documentation relating to safeguarding, its improvement plans, reports on its work, and records of pupils' progress. They considered the responses to questionnaires from staff, pupils and 91 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following aspects:

- the quality of teaching and its impact on the progress of different groups, particularly boys in Key Stage 1 and more able pupils in Key Stage 2
- how well the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils, focusing specifically on mathematics and writing
- how effectively the school's leaders are working to improve achievement in writing and narrowing the gap between the attainment of boys and girls
- the impact of what has been done to develop the literacy skills of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than average. A few pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds: this number is increasing. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. A few pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. A new deputy headteacher took up post at the beginning of January 2010. Over half of the teachers have been in the school for a little over one year. The school has gained a number of awards including Healthy Schools, Activemark and the Financial Management Standard.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to progress in learning made by pupils while in Key Stage 1 and the standards they attain at the end of Year 2.

Thorns Primary is a very welcoming and happy school. The buildings and grounds are kept well and the school provides pupils with the opportunity to learn in a safe environment. Most parents take the view that their child enjoys school. However, the quality of education provided by the school is lacking in a number of important areas. Although there has been some improvement, the areas for improvement highlighted at the last inspection have not been addressed sufficiently. The quality of teaching observed by inspectors does not enable all pupils to make as much progress as they should. The school has started to address this but further work is needed to ensure that all teaching is of a consistently high quality. In the past, teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage was not as good as it should have been, and this has constrained the learning and progress of pupils now in Key Stage 1. By the end of Year 6, pupils' attainment is slightly above the national average in English and science but has been slightly below in mathematics for the last three years. The attendance of pupils throughout school is low. As a consequence, pupils are not able to make sufficient progress in their learning.

The school's self-evaluation procedures are satisfactory and provide the senior leaders with accurate knowledge of where improvements are needed. This, together with the impact of the school's work on improving pupils' language development and the quality of teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage, indicates that there is a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement. The governing body, headteacher and newly appointed deputy headteacher show a determination to improve pupils' progress and raise attainment, and are having a positive impact. Senior and middle leaders are beginning to be more appropriately involved in monitoring their subjects with increased rigor. The school's improvement plan is focused on strengthening the quality of teaching and this is leading to better progress and higher attainment. Governors hold the school to account adequately but recognise that there is more that they can do to challenge the school on how well pupils progress in their learning and the standards they attain, particularly in Key Stage 1.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and improve pupils' progress, particularly in Key Stage 1, by:
 - improving consistency in the quality of teaching so that there is increased challenge for all pupils, particularly those who are more able
 - extending the use of focused questioning to assess and promote learning
 - improving the pace of lessons to ensure that pupils are engaged in learning throughout
 - providing guidance to pupils which consistently identifies how they can improve their work further
 - strengthening the focus on pupils' progress when senior leaders carry out monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning.
- Improve pupils' rates of attendance and punctuality by working effectively with all those responsible for ensuring pupils attend school more regularly.
- Strengthen the impact of leaders at all levels on school improvement by:
 - enabling the newly formed senior leadership team to drive school improvement processes forward
 - ensuring governors hold the school fully to account
 - making sure that actions taken as a result of robust monitoring and evaluation have a positive impact on pupils' outcomes.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

4

Pupils are keen to do well and they enjoy exciting practical opportunities that help them to learn. Attainment at the end of Year 6 is broadly in line with the national averages in English, science, and mathematics. In some of the lessons observed, pupils made satisfactory progress and achieved what was expected of them. However, progress in learning is not apparent in all lessons or in the pupils' books. Pupils do not make enough progress during Key Stage 1 from their starting points. Boys attain less well than girls at the end of Year 2. In the later years, pupils make better progress in lessons, enabling them to attain standards that are average. In the majority of these lessons, activities are planned appropriately to meet the individual needs of the pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in their learning as a result of the effective support provided by teaching assistants.

Pupils are caring and very supportive of each other and they are well behaved. Pupils are considerate of others' feelings and emotions and are very tolerant of those from backgrounds other than their own. The school is successful in encouraging pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles. Pupils say that they feel safe and cared for at school. They know that they can talk to adults if they have any concerns. They enjoy opportunities to take on responsibilities and participate enthusiastically in activities to help those less fortunate than themselves. The school council contributes successfully to the life of the

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school. When governors were interviewing for a deputy headteacher, the school council participated in the process. Pupils' attendance is low, mainly due to extended family holidays in term time. The school is working hard to resolve this issue although further work is required. A range of initiatives has been introduced, and the headteacher visits families of the few pupils where extended absence is a problem. Long periods of absence by some pupils are having a negative impact on how well they are prepared for their future.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is not good enough to promote sufficient progress for pupils in their learning. Where teaching is weaker, the more able pupils are not challenged appropriately by the tasks that are planned for them. Assessment information is not used well enough by all teachers to ensure that learning activities provide sufficient challenge. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to learn independently. Where targets for learning have been set, pupils do not always know what they are or how to achieve them because teachers do not refer to them often enough. Opportunities for

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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teachers to work more closely with teaching assistants in the planning of activities are missed; therefore not all pupils are supported sufficiently in their learning.

In the best lessons teachers maintain a good pace throughout and ensure that activities are matched well to pupils' abilities. Some teachers use questioning very effectively to provide challenge for pupils and to assess the impact of their teaching. For example, following some very engaging practical work in a history lesson, pupils' understanding was probed by the teacher who challenged them very effectively to consider how different education was in Tudor times compared to today. Information and communication technology is used in many of these lessons to good effect to support pupils in their learning. At its best, marking of pupils' work identifies the next steps which pupils must take to improve their work. In classes where the quality of teaching is weaker, marking is not focused on improvement.

The satisfactory curriculum is enhanced well by a range of visits and after-school clubs. Staff know the pupils well and take good care of them. There are robust procedures to ensure pupils' well-being. Transition arrangements between key stages and year groups work effectively and contribute positively to the generally good personal development and well-being of pupils.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	4
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	4
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and governors are keen to raise the quality of education and have high expectations for improving the outcomes for the pupils. The school's senior leadership team is relatively new and has clearly identified how it can tackle weaknesses. Leaders have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and the areas where urgent action is needed: the school's improvement plan sets out appropriate priorities. The school's leaders have focused on the progress made by pupils in their language development and have brought about some improvements. This can be seen in the robust tracking information produced by the school. Steps have been taken to improve the quality of teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the impact is apparent. Strategies to evaluate the quality of work in classrooms have had some impact but there needs to be more focus on the quality of teaching and the impact that it has on pupils' progress. The work of subject leaders to improve the quality of learning is beginning to have a positive effect. The governing body has structured its work to enable it to understand better the needs of the school. Governors recognise the need to both support and challenge school

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leaders and have identified how they can hold the school to account with more rigour. The governing body discharges its statutory responsibilities appropriately and ensures that all safeguarding procedures are met thoroughly.

The school works with a range of partners in supporting the learning and well-being of pupils although this does not result in all pupils learning as well as they should. Relationships with parents and carers are good. The school seeks their views and acts upon them. The school recognises its responsibilities with regard to promoting equality of opportunity. Currently there are some inequalities in the progress made by pupils, although resources were directed by school at the end of Key Stage 2 where improvement is apparent. The school has a sound understanding of its own community and has clear plans in place to further develop pupils' understanding of the wider national and international communities. The school is seen within the local community as making an important contribution. The school's leaders work within some very difficult financial constraints and do not always focus sufficiently on the deployment of resources which have the most impact for pupils' learning.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	4
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge that are lower than typical for their age and make satisfactory progress. The children settle quickly into routines and feel safe at school. They choose activities freely from within the classroom and outdoors and enjoy sharing resources and developing social skills. There is an appropriate balance of activities that are led by adults and those that children can

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choose for themselves. Attention is given to making healthy choices and children are able to select water and healthy snacks from the refrigerator. Phonics are taught daily and improvement is apparent in children's work. Behaviour is positive and children develop good relationships with each other. The teacher in charge of the Early Years Foundation Stage has recently taken on the responsibility and already there is emerging evidence of her positive impact on improving the language development of pupils.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Nearly half of parents and carers returned the inspection questionnaire. Many were positive about the school and its work and a large number also wrote comments to expand upon their views. Many praised the staff for helping their child to develop. One of the comments made by a parent was, 'I am so proud to say my children are part of the Thorns Primary community.' This comment typified the responses. A few parents feel that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. The inspection team investigated this issue and found no evidence to suggest that the school does not take unacceptable behaviour very seriously.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thorns Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 91 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 186 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	41	45	46	51	3	3	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	48	53	41	45	2	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	33	37	51	57	4	4	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	32	35	54	59	4	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	39	43	49	54	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	34	37	52	57	3	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	23	25	65	71	1	1	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	20	22	58	64	3	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	28	31	56	62	3	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	25	27	50	55	14	15	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	26	53	58	7	8	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	33	36	47	52	6	7	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	42	46	44	48	2	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



29 January 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thorns Primary School, Brierley Hill, DY5 2JY

Thank you for welcoming the inspectors so warmly in assembly and around school when we visited you recently. We really enjoyed meeting you and talking with you to find out about your school. Thank you to all who completed the pupils' questionnaires; they provided us with a great deal of information about your views. It is clear that you go to a very friendly and welcoming school. The education you receive could be better and this is why the school has been given a notice to improve. Inspectors will visit again to check that things are getting better.

These are the main things that we found out about your school.

You behave well at all times.

You enjoy school and want to do your best.

You care for others, both at school and in the wider community.

You know the adults care for you and this makes you feel safe and gives you confidence to talk to them if you have any worries.

You like lessons that are interesting and help you to learn.

You know how to eat healthily and understand why that is important.

To help your school to become even better we have asked the school's leaders to:

- work together more effectively to improve the progress made by all of you in your learning
- improve how they work with others to ensure that you all attend school regularly
- be more focused as a team on improving the school.

We have many good memories of our visit to your school and hope that you achieve all the ambitions that you shared with us.

Yours sincerely

Declan McCauley

Lead inspector

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