

Thornhill Primary School

Clough Bank, Rotherham, South Yorkshire, S61 1TD

Inspection dates 8–9 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is good school.

- From starting points which are much lower than those typically expected, pupils achieve well. They make good progress.
- By the end of Year 6, pupils attain standards in English just below what is normally seen. Reading is a strength of the school because of good teaching of letters and the sounds they make (phonics).
- The school is using additional government funding effectively to raise standards and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals are making good and improved progress.
- Teaching is typically good and there are examples of outstanding teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Very positive relationships with pupils ensure that they want to please their teachers and are keen to do well.
- Pupils behave well and say that they feel safe and cared for well.
- The headteacher's inspiring and motivating leadership has established a culture where expectations of pupils and staff are high and has resulted in very strong teamwork; this is moving the school forward very effectively.
- Governors are extremely knowledgeable about the school because they regularly check on how well it is doing. They are, therefore, able to provide an excellent balance of support and challenge.
- The local authority uses the school as a model of best practice when supporting other schools to improve teaching and learning and leadership.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There are not enough examples of outstanding teaching to support even quicker progress. Lessons are sometimes directed too much by the teacher and pupils do not always have enough opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Achievement in mathematics is not as strong as in other subjects.
- The more-able learners are not always fully challenged in lessons.
- Teachers' marking in books is not always consistent in helping pupils make quicker progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 20 lessons or part lessons taught by 11 teachers. Four were joint observations with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Each class was observed at least once.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own data on pupils' current progress, planning and monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, documents relating to safeguarding and the minutes relating to various meetings.
- Meetings were held with two groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and five other governors, senior and middle leaders and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents taken from the school's own questionnaires organised in 2012, two letters from parents and the views of six parents spoken to during the inspection. There were not enough responses on the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) for inspectors to view. They also took into account the 42 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Michael Wintle, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Naila Zaffar	Additional Inspector
Lynne Davies	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is above average. (The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children that are looked after.)
- The proportion of disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as a second language are much higher than the national average. The largest minority ethnic group consists of pupils who are from Pakistani heritage.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which sets the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Since the last inspection there have been significant numbers of pupils arriving at the school speaking little or no English.
- The headteacher has recently been the executive headteacher of a local federation of schools. She has returned recently to the substantive headship at Thornhill Primary School.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Move teaching from good to outstanding and therefore further improve pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring the more-able pupils are consistently challenged in their learning, by teachers reshaping lessons as they move along with harder activities, so as to improve the numbers of pupils reaching the higher levels
 - extending the best examples of marking found across the school by providing written comments that precisely tell individual pupils what to do next to improve so that they can then act upon them
 - making sure teachers give pupils more flexibility and opportunities to learn by themselves so teachers direct lessons only when appropriate
 - sharing outstanding practice that already exists in the school so that teachers can learn from each other.
- Raise attainment in mathematics further by:
 - sharpening pupils' ability to calculate swiftly and accurately
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to use and apply their mathematical knowledge to solve real-life problems in a range of situations.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- When children start school, their skills are well below those typical for their age and especially in their communication, language and personal skills. The teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and so children settle well into school life and make good progress. Pupils enter Key Stage 1 with skills and knowledge below those seen nationally.
- Progress over recent years has fluctuated in Key Stage 1 and especially Key Stage 2. Although pupils' standards of attainment reported in national tests for Year 6 pupils in English and mathematics in 2012 fell, most pupils made the expected rate of progress from their previous starting points.
- The school's systems for checking pupils' progress are exemplary and inspection evidence shows that in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 pupils are now making faster progress than in the past. Progress is now faster than that expected nationally. School data and inspection evidence indicate that the current Year 6 and Year 5 pupils are on course to meet challenging targets and improve on the 2012 results.
- Pupils make good progress in English. Reading is strength of the school. Right from Nursery, children have a secure grasp of a range of things they can do to extend their reading skills. Children learn to recognise letters and sounds that they make in the Early Years Foundation Stage and through Years 1 and 2. They blend their sounds and build words confidently. Older pupils read with expression and use their reading and literacy skills well, as seen in Year 3 and 4 when they read 'A day in the Forest.'
- Pupils make slower progress in mathematics because their calculation skills are not being developed quickly enough and some of their work is not based enough on using and applying their mathematical skills to solve real-life problems.
- Improvements can be seen in the numbers of pupils reaching average standards. However not enough pupils reach the higher levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6. This is because they are not always given work which is hard enough.
- Pupils of Pakistani heritage achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics because they are enthusiastic in lessons and willing to take part in all activities. The school is receiving growing numbers of pupils who are new to speaking English and new to the country. Their progress is also good because they are given the right help to improve their language skills.
- The school's leadership work tirelessly to ensure that the pupil premium funding is spent effectively, employing additional teachers and higher-level teaching assistant support. This is having a good impact on the achievement of this group. Gaps between their achievement and that of their classmates have narrowed. In the current Year 6, the gap in achievement in mathematics for those eligible for the pupil premium and those known to be eligible for free school meals was nearly three terms of progress behind. However, this has narrowed this year to one term in mathematics and much less for reading and writing.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs benefit from the good support provided by teaching assistants. Consequently, they make good progress and their attainment is better than similar pupils nationally.

The quality of teaching is good

- Overall, teaching is good across the school and some is outstanding. Relationships are a real strength and teachers treat older pupils as mature individuals.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is a strength of the school. A notable feature is how well teachers and teaching assistants enable children to use letters and sounds and how they use the indoor and outdoor environments to stimulate young minds.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use effective questioning to engage pupils. Teachers make learning challenging. For example, in a Year 5/6 English lesson on writing a balanced

argument, pupils were very engaged and keen to demonstrate their learning to each other on the value of having animal zoos. There was a good level of engagement and pupils could discuss the merits and disadvantages of animal welfare.

- Occasionally, the more-able pupils in both English and mathematics are not challenged and teachers' expectations of what they can do limits their progress. Sometimes, learning opportunities are lost because the more-able pupils are not given different, more challenging starting points with their learning. Also, there are times when opportunities for pupils to work independently are lost because teachers sometimes talk too much and do not give pupils the chance to get on by themselves.
- Questioning skills of teachers are good and stimulate thinking. Teachers and other adults use questions to enliven debate and interest. In one Year 3/4 lesson, the teacher used named lolly-pop sticks to choose children to answer questions. This not only involved all pupils, but it kept pupils on their toes because no one knew who the question was going to be aimed at.
- Teaching very effectively promotes pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is evident in lessons and around school. Pupils work together well, value the opinions of others, and show good awareness of their and other cultures. Lessons are rarely disrupted through unacceptable behaviour.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and provide ample reassurance and encouragement. Where marking is good rather than outstanding it fails to be specific about what precisely individuals need to do next to make their work even better and then check that improvements have taken place.
- Teaching staff are knowledgeable and support pupils well to promote good achievement. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, including those with behavioural and emotional difficulties, benefit hugely from a variety of well-thought-out approaches used to help them.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' behaviour is typically good and they enjoy learning. One Year 6 pupil said, 'I like school. It makes me enthusiastic about learning.' In lessons, pupils are keen to learn and work cooperatively with one another when given the chance to do so.
- Pupils are thoughtful and polite. They show respect to others and make a significant contribution to the school's calm, orderly environment. Pupils have a high regard for staff and these positive relationships encourage pupils to seek help if they need it.
- Pupils feel safe in school and well looked after. They have a good understanding of how to keep safe and talk confidently, for example, of why it is important to have a strong password when using the internet.
- Pupils have a good understanding of different types of bullying. They say that incidents of bullying are rare and, should they occur, staff deal with them effectively. The school takes prompt action to tackle any form of discriminatory behaviour.
- Pupils enjoy learning and coming to school. Parents spoken to during the inspection and through the questionnaires organised by the school said that their children were happy. As a result, attendance is average when compared to national figures and routines are in place to check attendance. Pupils understand the importance of arriving on time.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The inspirational leadership of the headteacher and the close collaboration of the deputy headteacher have helped drive standards upwards. All leaders regularly and assiduously check the quality of teaching and expectations are high. Senior leaders train and support school staff to become as good as they can be. Arrangements to support colleagues new to the profession

are exemplary and provide an excellent start to their teaching career.

- There is a very strong sense of teamwork and, as a result, morale in school is exceptionally high. Staff are united by a clear and strong commitment to provide the very best opportunities for every pupil. Senior leaders know exactly what needs to be done to secure further improvement, demonstrated by their searching and honest evaluation of how well the school is performing. Plans are highly focussed for continual improvement, for example the ongoing changes to the mathematics curriculum. However, the outstanding practice seen in teaching is not shared enough with others in the school.
 - A comprehensive performance management process is firmly established and regular meetings to check pupils' progress enable leaders to hold teachers' robustly to account for achievement in every class. Teachers are not allowed to move up the promotional ladder if their performance fails to meet the school's high standards.
 - Middle leaders are excellent in evaluating their subjects and knowing the strengths and areas to develop because they are well trained, trusted and highly motivated. An example of this is the way the Early Years Foundation Stage has been considerably improved since the last inspection.
 - The school's curriculum is enriched by music with exciting opportunities to play a brass instrument. The range of subjects and activities for pupils encourages enjoyable learning and the pupils are, therefore, encouraged in their work. There are good opportunities for pupils to apply their reading and writing skills when studying other subjects. The good use of visits enriches the work the pupils undertake. An outstanding range of clubs and activities also help broaden pupils' experiences.
 - The local authority provides a light-touch support for this good school and has an accurate view of the quality of what is provided, particularly the high quality of leadership. Indeed, the headteacher has provided outstanding leadership in supporting a nearby school, and this recent work was highly regarded within the local authority.
 - Arrangements for safeguarding meet all statutory requirements.
 - The school is highly successful at promoting equality of opportunity for all pupils and ensures that all groups of pupils achieve equally well, especially those who are considered to be more vulnerable. The school works well with parents and they express positive views about its work. One parent wrote, 'As a parent I am 100% satisfied. The headteacher takes great pride in the school and all the staff are a credit as they help the children in every way.'
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is highly effective and passionate about ensuring that pupils' achievement is good. Governors are very well informed and provide the right balance of challenge and support for senior leaders. They have an excellent knowledge of the quality of teaching in the school and the next steps to take to improve this still further. Relationships between governors and leaders are outstanding. Governors are fully involved in the decision making about how the pupil premium funds will be used and are developing extremely robust skills to monitor its impact. Governors are not afraid to make difficult decisions or hold the school to account. Systems are in place for the approval of pay rises so that these are tied to how well staff are doing. They have an excellent grasp on the strengths of the school and what the future challenges hold, in order to ensure further improvements.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	106849
Local authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	411870

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	320
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vicky Whitehead
Headteacher	Amanda Benton
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2010
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