

Thorntree Primary School

The Greenway, Thorntree, Middlesbrough TS3 9NH

Inspection dates

9–10 May 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- High levels of staff change have hindered leaders' efforts to bring about consistently good teaching across school. In some key stage 2 classes, pupils' progress has slowed due to previous staffing turbulence.
- Pupils do not make consistently good progress in mathematics and science. By the end of Year 6, standards in these subjects are below those found nationally. Outcomes in key stage 2 reading are just beginning to improve.
- In key stage 2, few pupils work at greater depth in mathematics and science. In Years 4 and 6, some teachers fail to provide sufficient challenge for most-able pupils. At times, their assessments do not match accurately the work seen in pupils' books.
- Systems used to track pupils' progress do not accurately report improvements made by some groups of pupils, especially pupils with low attainment. These pupils make good progress.
- Targets set by leaders to improve teachers' performance do not improve outcomes for pupils in key stage 2. Targets are not sufficiently sharp or challenging to explain the high expectations and exact outcomes that leaders want to see.
- Many newly appointed subject and senior leaders have not yet had sufficient time to improve outcomes for pupils. Pupils' learning in the wider curriculum has not been a priority for the school and progress is limited in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- In Reception, some staff lack confidence to teach phonics effectively. In Reception, children's progress in phonics is not as swift as elsewhere in school.
- In the early years, children make swift progress in most areas of learning. Attainment at the end of Reception remains just below national expectations.

The school has the following strengths

- Recently, the headteacher has improved pupils' learning behaviour, attendance and teaching. Better outcomes are now noticeable for most year groups, especially in key stage 1.
- Pupils, especially disadvantaged groups, make good progress in their writing in most classes.
- Governors are more knowledgeable now and ably provide challenge to leaders in school. They monitor outcomes more closely than at the time of the previous inspection.
- Nursery children make excellent progress in phonics, writing and mathematics.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the influence that leaders and managers have on pupils' outcomes across the school by:
 - ensuring that termly assessment information clearly shows the progress made by key groups of pupils, especially those pupils with lower ability who might make good progress but do not reach the expected standards for their age
 - ensuring that all teachers' assessments are moderated accurately, especially in Years 4 and 6, so that standards are reported correctly and precisely to governors
 - setting sharply focused and challenging targets for teachers' performance management that precisely explain the specific improvements that leaders wish to see in pupils' outcomes
 - supporting newly appointed subject leaders to measure the impact of their work using data and other information to show the difference they have made to pupils' learning across the school
 - developing teachers' skills and confidence when teaching and assessing pupils' learning across the wider curriculum, especially in geography and religious education.
- Improve teaching and learning across school so that more pupils reach national expectations and above by the end of Year 6 by:
 - increasing the proportion of pupils who work at greater depth and reach higher standards in mathematics and science
 - ensuring that pupils are challenged sufficiently with work which matches their different abilities, especially the most able
 - supporting teachers to improve pupils' learning and assessment in all subjects, particularly in geography and religious education
 - building the confidence and improving the skills of support assistants in the Reception class, to help them deliver more lively and challenging phonics activities that lead to increased learning for children
 - sharing more widely the good teaching and learning seen in key stage 1 and Nursery so that teachers in key stage 2 challenge pupils appropriately.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The school has experienced a large number of changes in staffing since the previous inspection. Over time, this has adversely affected leaders' endeavours to bring about good-quality teaching and learning consistently across all classes. The headteacher has found innovative ways to bring more stability to the staff team over the past two terms, but standards remain below expectations in some key stage 2 classes.
- The headteacher and her deputy understand the overall strengths and weaknesses in school. They have tackled most of the weak teaching and learning effectively by supporting several teachers to improve performance and increase pupils' progress. They have stabilised staffing now and staff morale is high. Staff are proud to work in the school and share the headteacher's vision for further improvement.
- Actions taken by new middle leaders are just beginning to improve pupils' progress. Most leaders use the guidance given by the headteacher and her deputy to improve outcomes for pupils. For example, attendance is increasing and staff now instil a love of reading across the school. However, inconsistencies remain in a few classes and teachers' expectations are not high enough, especially in mathematics and science at key stage 2 and for the most able pupils.
- Since the last inspection, the headteacher and deputy check teaching regularly. Other senior and middle leaders are keen to contribute and access supportive training. However, they are not thorough in checking pupils' progress. Further work is required to ensure that leadership is good at all levels. Leaders do not check how well teachers' assessments in key stage 2 match the work in pupils' books. Some staff misinterpret and over-inflate the actual progress made by their class.
- Systems for reporting termly assessments and progress are not yet sharp enough to show clearly the progress made by key groups of pupils. The school's system for tracking progress reports pupils' achievement termly into groups of above, below and expected attainment. Some pupils in lower-ability groups make good progress over the term but still remain in the 'below expected attainment' section of the school's records. As a result, the good progress made by this group goes unreported.
- Leaders improved outcomes for disadvantaged pupils last year in writing due to the focused plans and training provided for staff. Currently, disadvantaged pupils are making better progress with their reading than in previous years. Leaders recognise that plans for the use of pupil premium funding need to focus more sharply on mathematics for current disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders ensure that funding for physical education and sport is spent appropriately. This funding widens pupils' experiences of a variety of sports. For example, pupils enjoy their yoga sessions where they retell familiar stories using yoga poses. They demonstrate focus, calmness and determination here as they follow their teacher's examples.
- The headteacher and deputy overhauled procedures for checking on teachers' performance and this is much stronger. They check on pupils' test results, teacher assessments, lesson observations and work scrutiny. However, some of the other

senior leaders do not apply these systems accurately enough and this leads to inconsistencies. Targets set for teachers' performance management are not yet sharp or challenging enough to explain precisely the specific improvements that leaders expect to see in pupils' outcomes.

- Most of the school's subject leaders are newly appointed. They have made many changes since taking up their posts and some are improving teaching and learning. For example, guided reading sessions help pupils to understand and unpick the deeper meanings of books and other texts. Subject leaders do not measure the impact of their work using data and other information effectively. Most are unable to show how they have made a difference to pupils' learning in any real depth.
- Currently, pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress. Staff intervene well to support this group of pupils. Staff work as a strong team to ensure that each pupil who has SEN and/or disabilities gets the support they need. Leaders ensure that they use the additional funding provided for pupils who have special educational needs effectively.
- The curriculum helps pupils to use reading and writing skills across many subjects, especially in history. Teachers are not as confident in supporting pupils' learning in other subjects, such as geography and religious education. Opportunities for pupils to use mathematics and science skills across the curriculum are inconsistent.
- Pupils learn effective skills and strategies to improve their personal, social and emotional development. Lessons, assemblies and wider curriculum opportunities help pupils to understand British values. They demonstrate respect for others and listen attentively to other pupils' viewpoints within discussions. Teaching about different cultures and religions is not as strong as the other aspects of the wider curriculum.
- The local authority provides appropriate support to the school. They keep a close eye on the school's progress and recognise the capacity of leaders to bring about continuous improvements. The school is part of a trust with other local schools. They work closely together to share new ideas and train staff.

Governance of the school

- Under the leadership of a very able chair of governors, the governing body has identified its weaknesses and taken action to improve its knowledge and skills. The governing body appoints new governors astutely to support any gaps in expertise. Individual governors have a range of experiences, skills and local knowledge that equip them well for governance.
- Since the previous inspection, governors increased their challenge to leaders, by asking pertinent questions and requesting specific information to help decision-making. Some of the information presented to governors gives an inaccurate picture of pupil outcomes in key stage 2, because senior leaders have not checked it thoroughly.
- Governors' plans focus sharply on improving standards for disadvantaged pupils. Governors allocate pupil premium funding carefully to ensure that standards increased for disadvantaged pupils in writing last year. Governors recognise that progress is slower, for this group, in mathematics.
- Governors check the school's finances often. They allocated money to purchase new

books for the library and to support reading across school. Their visits and other methods of checking pupil outcomes show that this money is improving pupils' reading skills and instils pupils' enthusiasm for reading. Governors explain how the physical education and sport funding has increased sporting opportunities for all pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders keep safeguarding records appropriately and new electronic systems enhance the quality of recording. Records show the school's strong commitment to keeping children safe. Very good links with parents and carers and external agencies are evident and effective.
- There is a clear ethos embedded across the school that sets the safety of pupils as a high priority. Leaders create a culture where safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Staff are well trained and knowledgeable. They know their pupils well and are vigilant, spotting and reporting any safeguarding matters quickly.
- Governors make sure that checks on staff and volunteers are thorough to be certain that they are safe to work with pupils. They check the school's single central record regularly to ensure that it meets requirements.
- Leaders work closely with vulnerable pupils and their families. Staff and governors are rightly proud of the support and care they provide for pupils who have additional social and emotional needs. This area of the school's work is exceptionally strong.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher and her deputy have focused on stabilising teaching and making sure it is improving over time. While the quality of teaching leads to good outcomes in key stage 1, teaching is variable across key stage 2 and therefore requires improvement. Not all staff have high enough expectations of what pupils can do and achieve, especially the most able pupils.
- Recently, changes to the teaching of reading have improved pupils' outcomes. For example, teachers explore the meaning of new and unusual vocabulary effectively to deepen pupils' breadth and understanding of words. Pupils read frequently at school and most pupils read regularly at home, too. Staff ensure that extra reading opportunities are provided for those pupils who do not read at home. The school's own assessment information shows much swifter progress in reading this year than seen previously.
- The teaching of phonics in key stage 1 is now stronger than at the time of the previous inspection. Last year, the proportion of pupils who reached the standards expected for their age in the Year 1 phonics screening check was broadly similar to the national average. Currently, Year 1 pupils apply their phonic skills effectively to tackle new and unfamiliar words. However, the teaching of phonics is not always as effective in the Reception classes. Work in pupils' books shows that staff do not challenge pupils to work at higher standards in mathematics and science. At times, teachers do not match work to pupils' different abilities and progress slows, especially for the most able. The quality of teaching in science varies widely. In some classes, pupils produce a good

depth of explanation and scientific understanding. However, in some key stage 2 classes teachers do not intervene quickly enough to correct scientific misconceptions or deepen pupils' very basic scientific knowledge.

- Pupils now have more opportunities to solve problems in mathematics and to explain their thinking. For example, in a Year 6 class a small group of pupils explained clearly how they changed decimals to fractions and vice versa. The teacher in charge listened carefully and asked questions to prompt some of the less articulate pupils to give clearer explanations. Sometimes, however, the work set in key stage 2 is too easy and the most able pupils do not progress quickly enough.
- Results show that pupils' outcomes are improving more rapidly in writing than other subjects, especially for disadvantaged pupils. Most pupils have many opportunities to write at length across different subjects in the curriculum. Books show that pupils produce extended pieces of writing in history and this supports their learning about other times and cultures. For example, in Year 5, writing about the Egyptians shows detail and presentation is very neat.
- A scrutiny of pupils' books in key stage 2 showed that pupils have limited opportunities to learn about geography and religious education. Discussions with older pupils demonstrated that they have only a vague and at times inaccurate knowledge of world religions. Teachers' assessments in these subjects are embryonic.
- Teaching and learning are stronger in key stage 1 classes where staff challenge most pupils steadily, although, at times, too few pupils work at greater depth in their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The headteacher and her deputy have created a warm and inclusive school. Pupils comment positively on the many improvements made in school since the previous inspection.
- There are strong, effective and trusting relationships between staff and pupils that underpin the positivity across school. The nurturing environment helps pupils to feel safe. School provides a safe haven for its most vulnerable pupils in particular. Pupils told inspectors that their teachers look after them well and help them learn. Pupils enjoy school and staff morale is very high.
- Most parents said that their children are happy and enjoy coming to school. Many commented on improvements made to the school under the new headteacher's leadership. Parents were confident that staff take good care of pupils and some said that staff go over and above expectations when supporting families in need.
- Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and healthy. During the inspection, pupils in Year 5 enjoyed taking on the role of an 'agony aunt' and replied sensibly to internet safety dilemmas. They gave thoughtful advice that demonstrated their deep knowledge of how to stay safe online.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good overall. Pupils demonstrate good manners, considerate attitudes and respect for each other. They show respect towards adults and respond to visitors in a polite and friendly manner.
- Pupils enjoy the rewards and praise they receive for good behaviour and good work. Staff follow the school's systems for behaviour management effectively. They make swift but sensitive responses to a small number of pupils who have challenging behaviour.
- Behaviour is good in lessons and pupils conduct themselves well around school. The school is a calm and purposeful place. Pupils are proud of their school and say that bullying and misbehaviour are rare.
- Currently, attendance is increasing. Leaders use pupil premium funding well to work with families of pupils who are persistently absent. Staff support pupils who are persistently absent so that their attendance has improved considerably this year. More pupils access the breakfast club run by the school. This provides a calm and healthy start to the day and supports improvements to attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- For the last two years, pupils made too little progress by the end of Year 6. Published results define the school as 'coasting' at the end of 2017, because of pupils' slow progress. Leaders made changes to teaching and learning this year to stem the decline in progress at key stage 2, but outcomes in mathematics and science remain variable across different classes.
- In key stage 2, over recent years, pupils' progress in reading and mathematics was in the bottom 20% of schools nationally for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. By contrast, pupils' progress in writing improved and disadvantaged pupils in particular made swift progress. However, less than half of the pupils in Year 6 reached the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics combined last year.
- Currently in key stage 2, some pupils make insufficient progress to help them catch up and raise attainment in mathematics and science. Progress is too variable across different classes, including for the most able pupils, because teachers do not challenge this group of pupils well enough.
- In key stage 1, standards improved in all subjects last year. Pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics was broadly similar to other pupils nationally. Fewer pupils in key stage 1 worked at greater depth in their learning compared to other schools nationally. Teachers do not challenge the most able pupils as much as possible in key stage 1, especially in mathematics.
- Staff promote reading well now and instil in pupils a love of reading. A larger proportion of pupils in Year 1 reach the expected standards in phonics compared to previous years. This is because of effective staff training and new resources that help key stage 1 pupils to use phonics more effectively in their reading.
- Disadvantaged pupils make better progress in reading and writing than in mathematics. New procedures help staff to raise standards for disadvantaged pupils in English. Small

group activities and one-to-one support raise standards in reading and writing for disadvantaged pupils. Similar interventions help pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities to make better progress.

- Pupils' progress varies widely across different classes and across different subjects too. Work in pupils' books shows that progress in science requires further improvement at key stage 2. In other curriculum areas such as geography and religious education, pupils' progress is variable across classes.

Early years provision

Good

- The proportion of children reaching a good level of development has increased consistently over the past three years. Attainment at the end of the Reception class is now broadly in line with other schools nationally. A small proportion of disadvantaged children reach similar standards to other children too. Most children are ready for learning in Year 1.
- Provision for Nursery children is particularly effective. Adults frequently talk to, and question, children to build up their understanding of a broad and varied vocabulary. Staff play alongside the children, providing challenges and encouraging them to make decisions.
- Leaders identify the strengths and weaknesses in children's outcomes and prioritise the improvements needed. For example, this year, staff in the early years identified the need for improving boys' writing skills. Many opportunities exist indoors and outside to promote boys' writing. Many of the boys in Nursery can already write their own names now and attempt to write simple three-letter words using their phonic knowledge.
- Teachers generally challenge the most able children well across the early years and an increasing proportion now exceed expectations by the end of the Reception class. They track pupils' progress carefully across all areas of learning. Teachers' assessments are accurate and the work in pupils' books matches the assessments made.
- In the Reception class, some support assistants lack the confidence needed to deliver lively and challenging activities in phonics. As a result, some groups of children make slower progress when learning new skills in phonics.
- Children enjoy using numbers for many purposes and staff promote learning in mathematics at every opportunity. For example, at snack time, children count the number of cups needed for each member of the class and then cut up and share out fruit fairly. They learn independence well and develop finger strength and dexterity as they peel their own oranges and bananas.
- Staff provide many opportunities for parents to contribute to their child's assessments. Homework activities encourage parents to be involved in their children's learning at home. Children enjoy drawing story maps to help them retell their favourite stories at home and at school. Teachers model this skill effectively to inspire children's interests.
- Staff teach children how to keep themselves healthy and safe frequently in the early years. Children learn about oral hygiene every day when staff help children to clean their teeth after snack time. Children remember to wash their hands after handling their pet chickens.

- Children's behaviour is very good. They take turns, share resources sensibly and listen attentively to adults and other children.
- Safeguarding procedures are effective and staff ensure that all welfare requirements are met.

School details

Unique reference number	111633
Local authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	10048057

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	386
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cat Barnett
Headteacher	Wendy Nelson
Telephone number	01642 242309
Website	www.thorntreeschool.co.uk/
Email address	thorntree@mcschools.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–20 April 2016

Information about this school

- Thorntree Primary School is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage and nearly all speak English as their home language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is nearly three times higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above the national average.
- The school runs a breakfast club and has a Nursery class where children attend morning or afternoon sessions.
- The headteacher took up post in January 2016 and the deputy headteacher joined the school in February 2016. Since the last inspection, several teachers have left the school and many new staff have been appointed. Most subject leaders are new to post in the past year.

- The school is part of the Middlesbrough Co-operative Learning Trust.
- The school did not meet government floor standards in 2017. These are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes and scrutinised pupils' work. The headteacher and deputy also conducted joint observations with inspectors.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils to discuss their work and school life. Inspectors observed pupils moving around school and during breaks and lunchtime.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, newly qualified teachers and other staff members. Inspectors met with the chair of governors and a group of five members of the governing body. Inspectors met with a representative from the local authority and spoke with the school's improvement partner who is appointed by the governors of the school.
- Inspectors talked with parents informally at the beginning and end of the school day. There were insufficient responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, to consider.
- Inspection activities included a scrutiny of many school documents, including the school's view of its own performance, plans for improvement, attendance information and safeguarding records.
- Inspectors considered responses made by 33 staff to the Ofsted questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Anne Humble, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Dawn Foster	Ofsted Inspector
Cathy Lee	Ofsted Inspector

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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