

Thornton Primary School

Thornton Road, Ward End, Birmingham B8 2LQ

Inspection dates

6–7 October 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Standards and the school's performance have declined since the last inspection, including early years provision. Disruptions to staffing and temporary leadership have hindered the school's efforts to improve pupils' achievement.
- Pupils in some classes fall short of their expected attainment targets because the teaching is not always ambitious enough. This particularly affects the progress of the most-able pupils.
- Pupils' progress in reading and mathematics varies across classes, reflecting inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Assessments are not frequent enough to identify when pupils are falling behind. Pupils make relatively slower progress in reading compared with writing.
- Teachers do not always provide pupils with work that is at the right level of challenge.
- Although pupils behave well in lessons, some in Key Stage 2 play too roughly during breaktimes. Supervision and adult support are not always effective enough to improve behaviour.
- The early years requires improvement because the quality of teaching is variable and children do not have enough opportunities to work on their own.
- Although improving, some pupils eligible for pupil premium funding could still be achieving better. Some of these pupils are not making as much progress as others in the school and as other pupils nationally.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has made a good start and has done a great deal to pinpoint the right priorities. These include weaknesses in teaching and pupils' progress.
- Teachers are improving pupils' progress in writing and mathematics.
- A significant number of teachers have excellent subject knowledge and this helps them to inspire and enliven pupils and their learning. Increasingly, leaders and governors are utilising the skills of the most effective teachers to influence and improve the work of other staff.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. They are respectful and courteous around the school during lesson times and when they move between classes. Their personal development is good.
- Parents and carers are very supportive and are very pleased with the way the school is now being led, governed and managed.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and enriched with interesting topics, visits and projects for pupils to enjoy and learn. Pupils are effectively taught the British values of respect and tolerance of all faiths, religions, customs and cultures.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that teachers and support staff provide pupils with the right level of challenge in all lessons by:
 - planning work and extension tasks specifically for pupils who have the potential to reach or exceed age-related standards in reading, writing and mathematics
 - making sure that teachers and support staff regularly check that pupils correct mistakes and provide time for pupils to do this while the work is fresh in their minds
 - building on what pupils already know and understand, rather than going over too much work already learned, particularly for the most-able pupils.
- Make sure that senior and middle leaders and the governing body have a greater impact on improving teaching to raise achievement in all classes by:
 - securing more effective and direct leadership and oversight of early years provision which can influence and develop more good and outstanding teaching for the youngest children
 - making sure that teachers and subject leaders assess and check pupils' progress and performance more robustly to identify sooner any pupils who are falling behind
 - extending opportunities for leaders and strong practitioners to monitor lessons to provide teachers and support staff with the right pointers and guidance to improve their teaching
 - building on the start made by the new headteacher to implement the actions set out in the improvement plan and making sure that governors and leaders utilise funding better to reduce the surplus budget that has accumulated over the last few years.
- Improve the quality and effectiveness of supervision at breaktimes to make sure that all Key Stage 2 pupils behave well and safely when playing outdoors by:
 - keeping more effective records of playground incidents or accidents to provide better opportunities for leaders to carry out clear and accurate analyses that will improve playground behaviour
 - making more suitable alternative arrangements for pupils in Key Stage 2 to use the limited outdoor playground areas safely.
- Raise standards in reading and sustain the current rise in achievement in mathematics by:
 - building on the current programme of guided reading to give pupils more varied and interesting books to read, and checking more frequently that pupils are improving their reading skills
 - making sure that pupils develop and improve their problem-solving skills in all mathematics lessons, including more opportunities for pupils to explain the methods they use to calculate number problems and to work logically to solve more varied and challenging tasks.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management **requires improvement**

- Since the last inspection, disruptions to leadership roles and temporary arrangements to staffing and managerial responsibilities across the school have hampered the school's efforts to improve teaching and raise achievement. This has led to a decline in the school's effectiveness.
- Staff training and professional development have been weak, and temporary senior leaders and governors did not do enough to encourage the strongest teachers to work alongside others. This left teachers and staff with management responsibilities isolated so that the best practice was not being shared across the school. This also affected the early years which has not been managed directly or effectively to maintain good provision.
- Despite these shortcomings, leaders, staff and governors have managed to maintain stability. Current arrangements for overseeing and managing key stages, phases of the school and subjects are reversing a decline in standards, particularly in writing and mathematics. There are enough strong teachers across the school to influence the work of other staff so that the school has the capacity for sustained improvement.
- The recently appointed headteacher has added impetus, purpose and stability. She has already established herself as a strong leader with clear direction and purpose that is galvanising staff and the school community to do much better. Parents and carers overwhelmingly say that this headteacher is already making a real difference.
- The headteacher has already restructured roles and responsibilities, set challenging targets for teachers and pupils to aim for and has accurately identified where the most significant weaknesses in teaching and classroom support exist. This is leading to: well-focused plans for teachers and other staff to provide additional support; more involvement by subject leaders in checking teaching and pupils' performance; clear guidelines for governors and staff that set minimum expectations for lessons. There is already a strong and effective working partnership between the headteacher and key members of her leadership team which is being bolstered by one highly effective assistant headteacher.
- The school's improvement plan is based on a thorough and accurate assessment of what is working well and what needs to improve. Changes to the way pupils' progress is being measured, under new arrangements without National Curriculum levels, are well established. Targets in the improvement plan are realistic and achievable and already build on some successes in raising achievement in writing and mathematics. The headteacher's self-evaluation is, rightly, critical of what went on in the past. Current staff restructuring, training and professional development are much more relevant to the school now as leaders and governors move forward in their endeavours to make this a good school again.
- The curriculum includes a broad range of topics and subjects, including a modern foreign language (French), which is having a positive effect on pupils' personal development and well-being. In addition, leaders and staff have incorporated an effective personal and social development and health education programme that teaches the British values of respect, democracy and tolerance. Racism, intimidation and intolerance are tackled directly by leaders and staff, and the curriculum provides broad and relevant experiences to help pupils deal with the threats posed by extremism or radicalisation.
- Pupils learn about a range of religions, cultures and customs, and are well prepared for life in modern Britain by being made aware of the potential risks of online messaging or access to the internet. Issues, such as the dangers and illegality of female genital mutilation, and intolerance, such as homophobic bullying, are covered very well and sensitively through the school's personal and social development and health education programme. This programme is very well led and managed by the headteacher and a member of staff who is also a strong and highly effective teacher.
- Additional funding for pupils eligible for the pupil premium is targeted well at those who need to catch up, including pupils with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language. Support for these pupils is effective and tailored well to meet their specific learning needs. Improvements to assessment procedures are already helping teachers and leaders to identify which disadvantaged pupils are falling behind earlier than before. Teachers can then quickly provide the appropriate extra support to help these pupils catch up. The most recent unvalidated test results for Year 6 assessment in 2015 show that gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others across the school and nationally narrowed in writing and mathematics and in some classes gaps are also closing in reading.
- The PE and sport premium for primary schools is used very well to hire specialist coaches who work alongside class teachers and bring suitable resources that enrich and deliver effective physical education

and games lessons. Teachers and support staff benefit from this also, as they see at first hand what constitutes the effective teaching of physical education. Pupils benefit from the many opportunities they have to be active participants in sports and team games as well as learning to adopt healthy lifestyles when attending the many after-school clubs run by coaches, staff and leaders.

- The local authority has been ineffective and complacent. There has been no direct involvement or support by its officers, despite a significant dip in pupils' performance and progress in 2014, nor when the school had accumulated a large budget surplus. The lack of external support by the local authority has further isolated what was previously an inexperienced temporary leadership team. To compensate for this, the headteacher is already forging links with strong practitioners, advisers and schools to bring and share best practice. This is already proving successful and staff morale has risen as a result.
- There are effective and ambitious plans in place to reduce the budget surplus. These rightly aim to improve the physical structure and capacity of the school building and outside areas to cope better with the large number of pupils in Key Stage 2.
- **The governance of the school**
 - is improving and exerting more influence and challenge to the school's leaders and staff. The appointment of the current headteacher was well devised and timely. It has added stability and significant strength to the school's leadership capacity
 - is increasingly demanding more of the school's leaders and is forging more effective links through its committees with staff who have management responsibilities
 - has restructured and streamlined, as well as appointed more skilled governors who bring the necessary experience and track record of leadership to ensure that the school improves. A thorough skills audit has taken place and identified key governors with the necessary skills to work on relevant committees such as standards, safeguarding and finance
 - is dealing with the large budget surplus with clear plans agreed with finance officers from the local authority to improve the school building, particularly areas that are cramped and not suited to cater for the large number of Key Stage 2 pupils.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Procedures for safeguarding meet legal requirements. Procedures for recruiting, interviewing and appointing new staff are robust. Staff have been trained in the safe use of restraint, should this become necessary. Parents and carers are kept informed of the procedures through the school website and newsletters, to ensure that their children are kept safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The quality and consistency of teaching have declined since the school's last inspection. Teachers' expectations and the learning targets set for pupils are not always ambitious enough, and this is particularly the case for the most-able pupils.
- In too many lessons, time is wasted going over old ground. The most consistent and effective teachers get on with new learning and provide more varied and challenging extension tasks sooner, so that pupils have more time to practise and learn through trial and error or correct mistakes.
- In some lessons the pupils who reach or exceed age-related expectations spend too much time repeating or completing tasks that are pitched at a level that is too easy or that does not add much to what they already know and can do. Workbooks show that, for example, in mathematics pupils repeat exercises at the same level before moving on to harder work.
- The headteacher has introduced more effective and routine guided reading lessons to the school that offer more regular opportunities for pupils to practise and improve their reading skills. Inspection evidence through direct observation of such lessons and discussions with pupils while they read show that these lessons are already having a positive effect on reading standards. Nonetheless, pupils do not have enough opportunities to read widely and often, both in school and at home. This limits their development of language and vocabulary as well as their confidence to read fluently and independently.
- Teachers have improved pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics, although the quality of teaching and support across classes varies and is inconsistent in its impact on pupils' learning and progress. In some lessons pupils do not produce enough writing and sometimes mark time by rubbing out words unnecessarily or taking too long to set out a page with a title.
- Where there is strong teaching and support, pupils write more frequently and at length with confidence and enthusiasm. They are allowed to correct mistakes while they write and are provided with the right support and accurate information about the quality, form and structure of their writing. This was seen to

outstanding effect in a Year 6 poetry lesson which provided wonderful opportunities for pupils to recite their poems to the class and for pupils to listen and appreciate other pupils' efforts. The quality of poetry produced was to a high standard and included alliteration, personification and accurate prose.

- In mathematics, teachers are planning an increased amount of time and opportunity for pupils to solve problems and to explain their calculations when working out number problems. In some lessons, however, pupils are not always required to work things out for themselves because they are being directed too much by teachers or support staff. This leaves less scope for pupils to apply logical reasoning, or to demonstrate that they have mastered a particular way of calculating addition, subtraction, multiplication or division problems. The most effective teachers, especially those that have good or excellent subject knowledge, allow pupils to experiment with open problems without too much direction. This provides teachers and adults who support individuals or groups time to assess how much pupils already know and where there are gaps or misunderstandings.
- Assessment information about pupils' learning and progress has improved. It provides a sharp and accurate analysis of standards and rates of progress for each pupil and for significant groups such as disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. However, teachers do not always use these assessments precisely or regularly enough to check if pupils are on course to reach their targets. This is a significant weakness that has been identified, so leaders have increased the frequency with which such checks take place.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are usually taught and supported well. The pupils are provided with a good balance of close support and opportunities to work independently or with other pupils in a group. Assessments and plans for these pupils are well devised and appropriate for teachers to gauge how much progress pupils are making and how close they are to reaching their learning targets.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare require improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Personal, social and health education lessons and effective pastoral support make a strong contribution to pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Pupils confidently discuss topics about racism, bullying, including cyberbullying, and radicalisation as part of the many topics and themes linked to promoting their safety and well-being. Most pupils who spoke to inspectors said that poor behaviour or any form of bullying is rare in the school.
- Pupils enjoy assemblies and educational visits, such as a recent visit to an outdoor activity centre. These enable pupils to reflect on a range of issues that help them to grow into mature and balanced individuals who can contribute to their local and wider community. This is having a positive effect on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The election of school councillors and opportunities to represent the views of other pupils as head girl or head boy provide pupils with direct experience of representative democracy and communal responsibility to care for others.
- Pupils are confident, mature and responsible young people who look out for each other and, as many told an inspector, it is easy to make friends and enjoy school. There are positive and warm relationships between adults and pupils and among pupils.
- There are good routines and systems in place for staff to record concerns about an individual pupil or group. These are followed up by senior staff and personal learning mentors so that any pupil at risk of harm or who may be worried about something has an adult they know they can trust. The staff are vigilant and caring and are particularly knowledgeable and effective in helping to prevent pupils from exposure to radicalisation or extremist views.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Leaders and staff set high expectations for pupils' behaviour in and around the school. The staff are excellent role models and encourage pupils to behave well in lessons.
- In some lessons observed pupils strayed off task or got fidgety because the teaching was not challenging them enough. In these lessons, pupils were not expected to produce enough work and were given too

much time to complete tasks that ought to have been more demanding. Pupils are usually patient and tolerant of this so do not disturb others or teachers, but their progress slows as a result if they are allowed to drift 'off task'.

- Leaders and staff are acting swiftly to improve the way playground incidents and accidents are recorded, particularly when Key Stage 2 pupils play outdoors at breaktimes. Some pupils play too roughly and this affects other pupils who have to dodge or avoid collisions in playground areas that are too small for the large numbers of pupils. Supervision and staggered breaktimes are starting to minimise playground accidents, but there is still more to be done to reduce these further.
- There are good opportunities for pupils to learn about other faiths, customs and traditions through religious education, the arts, music, themed topics, projects and educational visits. The school is successful in promoting a strong emphasis on tolerance and equality, which prepares pupils well for life in a modern democratic Britain.
- Leaders and administrative staff keep robust records and monitor patterns of absence well. Staff have worked well with parents to encourage pupils to attend regularly and to come to school on time. As a result, attendance is always in line with, or exceeds, the national average. The school is also using effective measures by working with families to reduce persistent absence rates, which are very low compared with those of other schools nationally.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- A significant number of pupils of different abilities and needs have fallen behind because of disruption to their learning and inconsistent teaching as they moved through the school, particularly in Key Stage 2. About one in four pupils in most classes have at some point underachieved or not reached their expected attainment targets. This is evident in the most recent national test results, although these are yet to be fully validated.
- Standards in the most recent national test results declined compared with the previous year, although current pupils across the school are starting to make up for lost ground. The most recent national results show that attainment was broadly in line with last year's national average by the end of Year 6 in English, but declined in mathematics. This represents variable progress as most pupils who joined the school in Reception started from very low starting points, but many that joined in Year 3, the majority of which came from a feeder infant school, did not make enough progress over time.
- For current pupils in the school and in relation to their starting points, most are starting to catch up and recover previously lost ground because of more effective and consistent teaching. There is evidence that in Year 2, for example, where there is consistently strong teaching, most pupils are reaching or exceeding age-related expectations in writing and mathematics and are catching up in reading where the teaching of phonics (linking letters with the sounds they make) is particularly effective. Some ground was lost in Year 1, despite some very effective phonics teaching in Reception.
- The school's assessments show that gaps are closing between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others. Previous national test results show that this gap was approximately one term, and has now reduced in reading and mathematics by half a term and has closed in writing.
- The teaching in Years 3 to 6 varies in the demands it places on pupils. However, workbooks and observations of pupils in lessons show that there is some highly effective learning and work provided for pupils that is helping pupils to catch up and make better progress than previously.
- The most-able pupils are now doing better than previously, although in some classes they are not reaching their full potential because of undemanding teaching. Assessments show that an increasing proportion of pupils in both Key Stages 1 and 2 are exceeding age-related expectations in writing and mathematics, although less so in reading.
- Work in pupils' books is usually well presented and consistently reflecting most teachers' high expectations. Nevertheless, there remain inconsistencies in the quality and quantity of writing and mathematics work depending on the quality of teaching and support.
- Pupils' reading, spelling and grammar work is improving, and this includes pupils who are learning English as an additional language because there is effective and well-timed additional support for them. These pupils do particularly well in mathematics, but in some lessons they are not always being stretched.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make similar rates of progress as other pupils, and receive appropriate levels of support both with their classmates and when working separately as a group or individually during focused activities with an adult.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- There is a mixed picture to report in the early years. The children are happy and safe and enjoy coming to school. They have settled down quickly and formed positive relationships with adults. Their personal development and behaviour are good.
- Most four- and five-year-old children who join the school's Reception class start with skills and abilities that are well below those expected for their age, particularly in language, communication, mathematics and social development. The teaching is supportive and encouraging, but does not give children enough opportunities to work on their own or to make their own choices without adult direction.
- Outcomes vary and therefore require improvement. Adults model language and provide effective support with early reading and writing skills. The environment is enriched with words and pictures and is stimulating for the children. However, some learning time is lost when the children are taught in large groups as they do not have the necessary personal and social skills to listen to instructions for sustained periods of time in large groups. The teaching requires improvement.
- The children learn better in small groups, and they enjoy some stimulating indoor and outdoor resources and equipment and interacting with adults.
- The children behave well. They cooperate with other children when singing together using numbers and rhyme to count 'one little man away'.
- Adults do not always offer the right level of challenge for the children so time is wasted as children wander from one area to another without purpose. The children are happiest when playing with tactile materials, such as sand and water. Adults are very good at questioning the children when in areas such as the home corner, so that the children experience role play and try to cooperate with other children sharing resources and equipment.
- Effective learning was observed when a sports coach led a physical education lesson in the school hall. The children listened to instructions and thoroughly engaged with their 'leader' (the coach) as they copied different ways of walking, such as marching or tiptoeing quietly. Not all the children were dressed in suitable footwear for this lesson.
- The children are taught phonics which prepares them well for Year 1. The quality of teaching requires improvement, though, because too few children reach a good level of development in all areas of learning by the time they start Year 1, particularly in their personal and social development and language.
- Additional funding is used well to provide extra support for disadvantaged children and those in the very early stages of learning English.
- There are strong partnerships and relationships with parents and carers. Parents report that they are very pleased with their child's education in the early years. There are good partnerships with other early years settings, such as local nurseries that link with the Reception class, to ensure continuity for young children joining the school. Home visits and contact with parents and carers are well organised and effective to ensure smooth transition into school.
- Leadership and management of the early years require improvement. The annex where the Reception class is situated is on a separate site to the main school and is isolated. There has been no clear and direct oversight or management of the early years, which has added to its isolation as a key stage. The monitoring and support provided for staff is not consistent to ensure that every adult working with children provides consistently high-quality support, care and teaching. The staff plan together and share ideas to influence and improve each other's teaching, but there is a lack of external or objective evaluation or assessment for staff to see what constitutes effective early years practice.
- The staff are caring and committed and ensure that all welfare for this important early stage of children's education fully meets requirements. Children are playing and learning in a safe and secure environment.

School details

Unique reference number	103268
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10008006

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	715
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr A Ali
Headteacher	Mrs S Simmons
Telephone number	0121 327 0824
Website	www.thornton.bham.sch.uk
Email address	enquiry@thornton.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 April 2014

Information about this school

- Thornton Primary School is a very large school. It has one early years class and a Year 1 class in a separate annex building, divided by a road. The Reception class (early years), comprising up to 30 children aged four, attend full time. At the start of Year 3, the school takes an additional four classes from a local infant school so that in Key Stage 2 there are five single-age classes in each of Years 3 to 5 and currently six classes in Year 6.
- Most of the pupils are of Pakistani heritage. Other pupils come from a range of backgrounds representing minority ethnic groups and a small proportion are White British. Most pupils speak English as an additional language, although a small number are in the very early stages of learning to speak English.
- The percentage of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is similar to that of most schools.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school was previously led and managed by an acting headteacher. The current permanent headteacher was appointed and joined the school at the start of September this year.
- Inspectors were aware during the inspection that a serious incident, that occurred at the school while pupils were in the care of staff employed by the school since the previous inspection, is under investigation by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the incident were considered alongside other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with no notice.
- In addition to lesson observations, inspectors reviewed pupils' work; met with groups of pupils to discuss their work, behaviour and safety, or to hear them read; asked pupils their views about the school. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour in the playground and at other times during each of the two days of inspection.
- The inspection team held discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, other members of teaching and support staff and pupils. The lead inspector met the Chair of the Governing Body, a co-opted governor and a parent governor. Inspectors spoke to pupils during lessons about their work and progress.
- Inspectors spoke informally to a number of parents and carers to seek their views about the school. There were too few responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, to analyse, so inspectors considered the results and analysis of the school's own recent survey of parents and carers.
- Inspectors spoke informally to a number of staff, including newly qualified teachers, to provide feedback on lessons observed and to seek their views about the way they are supported.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including: the school's improvement plan; information about pupils' achievement, progress and performance; governing body minutes; information related to teaching, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

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Stuart Bellworthy	Her Majesty's Inspector
Amarjit Cheema	Ofsted Inspector
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Helen Quinn	Ofsted Inspector

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