

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Thomas Hickman School

Belgrave Road, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP19 9HP

Inspection dates:

4 and 5 February 2025

Outcome

Evidence gathered during this ungraded (section 8) inspection suggests that the school's work may have improved significantly across all areas since the previous inspection. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are rightly proud of their school. They are given a say in running the school and know that they are listened to. They are happy and kept safe. Pupils' behaviour in classrooms and around the school is calm and orderly.

The school has very high ambitions for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils follow a broad, interesting and well-designed curriculum. Learning in all subjects is organised meticulously. This helps all pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding. Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning, independent and resilient. They produce work of a consistently high quality across different subjects and are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

There are a wide range of responsibilities available for pupils to take on, including roles as members of the 'pupil parliament'. These members play a key part in decisions around the further refinements within the curriculum, and about behaviour, personal development and safety. They share these changes with the whole school through pupil-led assemblies. Consequently, they show a clear commitment to school life. Elections for these roles provide pupils with an understanding of democracy. They talk confidently, at an age-appropriate level, about how this links to laws being agreed in national parliament. This prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Children get off to a really great start in the Nursery. The school has invested in new provision for two-year-olds, providing earlier high-quality education for disadvantaged children. There is a relentless focus on developing children's language and vocabulary. All

staff understand that this is vital to enable children to access the rest of the curriculum. Staff identify and teach vocabulary sequentially. Children learn how to respond when answering questions and talking with each other. Those who struggle with this get the right help through a range of ways to support their speech and language development. As a result, children learn to communicate effectively.

Developing a love of reading in pupils is a key priority for the school. For example, the school organises events to get parents involved, as well as promoting reading on 'Magazine Mondays' and 'Fiction Fridays'. Staff are well trained and deliver phonics consistently well. Staff identify pupils who fall behind and put additional support in place to help them to catch up. Books used to help pupils develop their reading are well matched to the sounds pupils know. This provides opportunities for practice and helps them to build fluency in their reading. The phonics programme has taken time to embed but has had a very positive impact on younger pupils.

The school has given careful thought to how the curriculum is sequenced to help pupils learn and remember more over time. For example, in geography, younger pupils learn about aerial maps linked to London and the Thames. This prepares them for later learning about rivers and their flow when they study the Thames in more detail. Similarly, in mathematics in Reception, children learn to recognise amounts visually on a 'ten frame'. This builds children's early understanding of numbers to 10, enabling more complex addition and subtraction in Year 1.

Staff have secure subject knowledge because of regular training and support. This enables them to deliver the curriculum consistently and according to the school's intended approaches. Teachers skilfully check pupils' understanding. They are alert to any misconceptions. When these are present, teachers intervene effectively and adapt or revisit learning as required. This approach is particularly beneficial for pupils with SEND and enables them to access the same learning as their peers, with careful adaptations to achieve this. Consequently, all pupils are developing a real depth of understanding in the different subjects that they learn. This is evident when talking to them about their learning and in the quality of work in books.

Pupils behave extremely well. This is because they learn about the importance of positive behaviour 'even when no one is watching'. As a result, they are committed to their learning and disruption in lessons is very rare. Most pupils have good attendance and punctuality. There is highly effective support in place for those whose attendance needs to improve, but pupil absence remains an ongoing challenge.

The offer for pupils' broader personal development is a significant strength of the school. The school's culture is supportive and understanding. Relationships between staff and pupils are trusting, caring and nurturing. There is a persistent focus on developing self-control, resilience and strength of character. These aspects are realised in practice. For pupils who struggle with behaviour, bespoke provision is provided by highly trained staff. This teaches pupils the coping mechanisms they need and promotes mental health and well-being.

This school does not stand still. Leaders and those responsible for governance are relentless at driving continued improvement and finding solutions to any barriers that arise. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the support they get to manage their workload and the value the school gives to supporting their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in September 2019.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	110313
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10341280
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	514
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Alan Sherwell
Headteacher	Pippa Brand-Benee
Website	www.thomashickman.bucks.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	11 and 12 September 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- The school offers provision for two-year-olds. This is in a purpose-built building within the school grounds.
- The school offers a breakfast and after-school club.
- The school uses two providers of alternative provision. One is registered and one is not.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspector met with the headteacher, the deputy headteachers and members of staff. They also spoke with a representative of the local authority and met with three governors, including the chair of governors.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector looked at a range of documents, including leaders' priorities for improvement.
- The views of pupils, parents and staff were gathered through discussions, and responses to Ofsted's surveys were considered.

Inspection team

Samantha Ingram, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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