

Thomas Hickman School

Belgrave Road, Aylesbury HP19 9HP

Inspection dates

7–8 October 2015

Overall effectiveness

Good

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school's leaders have worked tirelessly to bring about improvements since the last inspection. Pupils, parents, staff and governors comment on how much the school has improved. In the words of one parent, the new headteacher 'has done wonders'.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance has improved. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are polite and cooperate well with their peers. Relationships are a strength.
- Leaders have established a school culture of respect and tolerance. There is a focus on helping pupils, including those in the early years, to understand British values.
- Pupils in most year groups are making good progress, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The outcomes at the end of the Reception have improved dramatically, reflecting the good teaching and provision in the early years.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is now good as a result of school leaders' high expectations and regular, rigorous monitoring. All teachers provide detailed written feedback to pupils and give them time to respond and improve.
- The school has established effective links with other primary schools. Support from the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust has been well-targeted and effective.
- Governors know the school well. They are supportive as well as offering a good amount of well-informed challenge to ensure that improvement continues.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils, particularly the most able, are given too few opportunities to write at length in literacy and other subjects.
- The presentation of pupils' work is sometimes spoiled by the poor quality of their handwriting.
- Older pupils are not given sufficiently challenging homework.
- Pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 do not have enough opportunities to engage in creative subjects during lessons or in school clubs.

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - pupils, particularly the most able, are given more opportunities to write at length in literacy and other subjects
 - older pupils are given more challenging homework
 - teachers insist that pupils apply their neat joined-up handwriting in all of their work.
- Provide pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 with more opportunities to experience creative subjects such as art, drama and music in timetabled lessons and in after-school and lunchtime clubs.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good.

- The headteacher has driven the significant improvements in the school since the last inspection through her high expectations and ambition for pupils at the school. Governors and staff share this determination to improve. There is an evident sense of teamwork and cooperation among staff, reflected in their responses to the staff questionnaire, all of which were positive.
- Parents and pupils recognise the improvements in behaviour and the quality of teaching and learning in the past 18 months, described as 'phenomenal' by a teacher and 'the best the school has been' by a parent. Several parents commented positively on the new approaches to teaching literacy and numeracy that the headteacher has introduced. These approaches are applied consistently by teachers and teaching assistants, who have all been trained in how to use them.
- School leaders, including subject leaders, are monitoring the quality of teaching and learning rigorously and systematically, which has helped to bring about improvement. There are several new teachers this term and they are being supported well by colleagues, with individual action plans.
- Staff appraisal is planned well, with targets for staff linked to whole-school and individual priorities. There has been a good level of training in health and safety, child protection and safeguarding, as well as in teaching, learning and assessment. Staff run popular 'master classes' to share good practice, such as in how to teach negative numbers.
- The curriculum for pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 is reasonably broad but has focused, not inappropriately, on the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics to raise standards rapidly in these areas. There are also regular lessons in physical education, computing and science, but fewer in creative subjects such as art, music and drama. The after-school and lunchtime clubs do not include many creative activities.
- The school provides well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development from the early years onwards. Pupils know the school's values – Brave, Inspire, Respect, Determined and Scholarship (BIRDS) – and are engaging well with discussions and assemblies linked to British values. They are learning about a range of cultures and faiths, and about democracy through, for example, voting for members of the school council and the Thomas Hickman Parliament. Pupils enjoy being given responsibilities, such as a play leader to help others in the playground and being members of the school council.
- School leaders have ensured that each eligible pupil benefits from the additional pupil premium funds. The funds are used to pay for a range of strategies, such as one-to-one tuition to help pupils catch up in numeracy and literacy, funding the breakfast club (which a parent described as 'fantastic'), school trips and after-school clubs. The impact has been positive in helping to close the attainment gap between eligible pupils and others in the school and nationally.
- The primary school physical education and sports premium funding is used well to enable the physical educational coordinator to teach all pupils for one hour per week and to train other staff. Specialist sports coaches have been brought in to introduce pupils to new sports, such as karate. Increasing numbers of pupils now take part in physical activity at school and in competitions. As a result of the initiatives, the school has recently gained the national Silver Award Games Kitemark.
- The school has received timely and effective support from the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust (BLT). This support is being reduced as the BLT's confidence in the school's leadership team has grown. The school leaders now determine what support they need and are proactive in seeking help from a number of sources, including a national leader of education (NLE). There are strong links with a group of primary schools in similar contexts with, for example, the sharing of good practice and moderation of teachers' assessments.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance has improved significantly since the last inspection. Governors have prepared their own action plan for improvement and they now provide a good level of well-informed challenge to school leaders. They are aware of what is working well and what needs to improve further.
 - Governors are effectively monitoring the use and impact of additional funding. They are knowledgeable about pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils say that they feel safe and parents agree. The school has established effective links with external agencies and takes swift action where there are concerns about pupils' welfare and safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good.

- Teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection. School leaders have established high expectations for the quality of teaching and are monitoring this relentlessly. As a result, there is a consistent approach to how teachers plan lessons and give pupils feedback. The quality of written feedback in pupils' books is a strength. It provides pupils with detailed comments on how to improve. Pupils understand the school's approach and are given time to make corrections in response to teachers' comments and, in some cases, challenging questions.
- Teachers plan lessons carefully to ensure that work builds on previous learning, identifying pupils who need additional help. They aim to ensure that all pupils achieve the expected knowledge, understanding and skills in each subject. Teachers are assessing this using a newly introduced scheme that identifies milestones for each subject and National Curriculum objectives. Teaching assistants are generally deployed effectively to provide additional support in lessons, and to challenge and question appropriately to ensure that no pupil is left floundering.
- There is a purposeful and productive atmosphere in the majority of classrooms, and pupils engage with enthusiasm in their learning. Teachers' questioning is often effective and encourages pupils to think carefully. Pupils are asked to share ideas with each other and to explain how they worked something out. This is particularly evident in mathematics where the approach used is challenging for all abilities and pupils act as 'partner teachers' to help their peers when they get stuck.
- Staff are attempting to improve pupils' presentation and handwriting. Most teachers model this well for pupils. The quality of pupils' writing, which is good in their handwriting booklets, is not always sustained in their literacy and topic books. The presentation of pupils' work is sometimes undermined by the poor quality of their handwriting.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are identified carefully and, in most cases, appropriate support is arranged to help them make good progress. Teaching assistants provide effective support for these pupils; they are knowledgeable and their questioning is well targeted and helps pupils to improve.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and focus in lessons. The level of challenge has improved since the last inspection and there is no evidence that teachers have lower expectations for more disadvantaged pupils. Work for the most-able pupils is often appropriately stretching, particularly in mathematics. There are not enough opportunities for pupils, particularly the most able, to write at length in different subjects.
- Teachers provide pupils with a range of homework activities from the early years onwards. Homework is not always challenging enough for the older pupils. Some parents are happy with the amount of homework, but a few others and some older pupils suggest that they could be given more challenging homework.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils in all year groups have positive attitudes to the school and to their learning. They say that they are proud of their school. From the Nursery onwards, they show a willingness to cooperate with adults and their peers, and persevere when engaged in interesting activities. They are keen to talk about what they are learning and demonstrate increasing self-confidence and responsibility.
- Pupils feel safe in school and understand what to do if they are bullied, which they say is rare. They are taught how to keep healthy and enjoy the range of sporting activities on offer. Pupils take part enthusiastically in group physical activities, such as skipping and basketball, during lunchtimes.
- Relationships throughout the school are a strength. Pupils work well together and are encouraged to share ideas and to teach each other.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils, parents, governors and staff comment on how much the behaviour has improved since the last inspection. Parents say that the school is helping their children to behave well.

- Pupils are attentive in lessons and engage well with their learning. They cooperate well with others and are respectful and polite. They behave well in lessons and around the school. Occasionally, pupils lose concentration and their attention wanes when they are not fully motivated by an activity. For the most part, teachers manage pupils' behaviour well and consistently apply the school's policy. Pupils enjoy the rewards, such as 'feathers' for good behaviour and attitudes, linked to the school's values. They aspire to receiving a tie for particularly good behaviour.
- Attendance and punctuality have improved over the last two years as a direct result of the school's detailed tracking and strategies to improve them. Attendance is now close to the national average. The school communicates swiftly with parents when issues arise, and organises effective support to help improve the behaviour and punctuality of individual pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

are good.

- Pupils currently in the school are making good progress in most classes and subjects. Younger pupils are developing good knowledge of the sounds that letters makes (phonics), which helps them to read unfamiliar words. Results in the phonics screening check rose dramatically to 95% in 2015 and nearly all pupils who retaken the check in Year 2 passed. Pupils enjoy reading and have access to the library at lunchtimes. A parent commented that reading books are changed regularly and that her children now love reading.
- As a result of improvements in the quality of teaching, pupils' outcomes at the end of Year 2 have improved steadily over the past few years. Increasing proportions of pupils attained expected and higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics, reflecting higher expectations. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6, which had been rising steadily, dipped in 2015, particularly in mathematics. However, these pupils' progress from most starting points was above average. The school has reacted swiftly to improve the teaching of mathematics and current progress is good.
- Pupils of Pakistani origin and those who speak English as an additional language make at least as good, and in some cases better, progress than others in the school across most subjects. Similarly, pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium make progress broadly in line with other pupils in the school and nationally. The attainment gaps closed this year in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school identifies carefully how to provide additional support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. As a result of this additional support, these pupils are mainly making good progress in all subjects.
- Staff are conscious of the need to provide challenge for more-able pupils. Expectations have been raised and, as a result, these pupils are making better progress. The proportion of higher levels attained at the end of Years 2 and 6 reflects this improvement. The current mathematics teaching is suitably challenging and the most-able pupils are taught in smaller groups where they are given suitably demanding work. The literacy scheme also provides opportunities to stretch the more-able pupils and standards in reading and writing are rising. The current work indicates good progress, but there are not enough opportunities for the most-able pupils to extend their skills by writing at length in English and in other subjects.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next phase of their education, with the exception of homework for older pupils. Some Year 6 pupils described how the school was helping them prepare for secondary school. Pupils in the Reception classes are developing skills and attitudes that will enable them to settle quickly into work in Year 1.

Early years provision

is good.

- The early years provision is well led and managed. The school provides a safe and stimulating environment for children, including the two-year-olds, inside and outside. The areas are well organised and offer good opportunities for pupils to develop skills in all areas of learning. The school has enlisted the help of a teacher from a school with outstanding practice to provide effective support to teachers who are new to the early years.
- Children have many opportunities to develop their writing and reading skills. They were seen writing names and stories on their own or supported by adults. They enjoy writing in chalk on the playground and many eagerly explain what they are doing. Several children arrive with little English but they are soon helped to make good progress.

- A range of activities help to develop children's numeracy skills, and adults take every opportunity to encourage children to count. More-able children are challenged by writing numerals and subtracting numbers. They enjoy matching up the numbers and dots on the large dominoes outside.
- The children are taught well. Adults interact with children effectively through good-quality questioning and encouraging children to respond in full and correctly formed sentences. They assess what children can do and where they need more practice and support. Disadvantaged children and those who have special educational needs or who speak English as an additional language are monitored closely and supported effectively. They are helped to make as good progress as their peers. Staff assessments of children on entry to the Nursery show that many start with skills around 10 months below expectation for their age. By the end of the Reception, most have reached the expected standard.
- As a result of the good provision, children make rapid progress across all the areas of learning. The proportion reaching a good level of development rose by 30% in 2015 to 75%, which is above that found nationally. Children behave well and respond promptly to adults' instructions. They concentrate well on tasks and are learning to play sensibly with their peers. They are being prepared effectively for life in Key Stage 1.

School details

Unique reference number	110313
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10001643

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	418
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Sherwell
Headteacher	Helen Emmett
Telephone number	01296 485683
Website	www.thomashickman.bucks.sch.uk
Email address	office@thomashickman.bucks.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	15–16 January 2014 and 4–5 March 2014

Information about this school

- Thomas Hickman School is larger than the average-sized primary school, with two classes in each year group. The school has a part-time Nursery for three- to four-year-olds and this year has introduced provision for four children aged two to three years. There are two full-time Reception classes.
- There have been several changes of staff since the last inspection, including a new headteacher.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well above average, with the majority of these being of Pakistani heritage. Over a third of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- An above-average proportion of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium. This is additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or in the care of the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above the national average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school has been supported by a national leader of education from Buckingham Primary School.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in each class, with most observations alongside the headteacher or deputy headteacher. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' current work in all subjects and in a sample retained from last year. They spoke with pupils in an arranged meeting, during lessons and during lunch- and breaktimes. They listened to pupils read and spoke with them about their reading habits.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders and subject coordinators.
- Inspectors met with six members of the governing body and two representatives of the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust.
- Inspectors talked to parents in the playground at the start and end of the day.
- A range of school documents were studied, including information about pupils' progress and attainment, minutes of governing body meetings, the action plan, the self-evaluation report, the headteacher's reports to governors, safeguarding documents and records, attendance and behaviour data, policies, records of the monitoring of teaching and information relating to teachers' performance targets and training.
- Inspectors took account of the 24 responses of parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 30 questionnaires returned by staff. They also looked at parents' responses to previous questionnaires issued by the school.

Inspection team

Helena McVeigh, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Suzanne Cawson	Ofsted Inspector
Margaret Wolf	Ofsted Inspector

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Manchester
M1 2WD

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