

Thomas Russell Junior School

Gilmour Lane, Barton-Under-Needwood, Burton-on-Trent, DE13 8EU

Inspection dates 17–18 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Teachers are helping pupils to catch up but the progress made by some more able writers now in Year 6 has been too slow in the past.
- Some boys do not achieve as well in writing as they do in reading and mathematics.
- Improvements to teaching are not always improving pupils' learning over time quickly enough.
- Lesson activities are not always sufficiently challenging, particularly for the more-able and lesson objectives are not always focused on learning so that pupils know what must be achieved.
- Staff absence has resulted in improvement being driven mainly by the headteacher's leadership until recently.
- Leaders of special educational needs and English and mathematics are not always checking robustly enough the impact improvements are making on pupils' progress.
- The governing body has not had all of the required information about pupils' progress until recently to inform improvement planning.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher's and governors' drive for improvement have improved teaching, and improved provision has raised standards, especially in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils' positive attitudes and good behaviour make a strong contribution to learning and to promoting their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Teaching in some areas is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. Pupils are now sustaining their above average attainment to the end of Year 4.
- The school ensures that parents have access to a wide range of information about the school's work and their children's progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 15 lessons taught by nine teachers. In addition, inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons.
- Inspectors met with small groups of pupils, with staff, representatives of the governing body and the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at pupils’ work in books and on display, past and current information about pupils’ progress, and documents relating to behaviour, safeguarding, monitoring, and school improvement planning.
- The inspectors talked to parents informally at the start of the day and took into account 67 responses shown in the online questionnaire (Parent View), parent forum minutes and the school’s recent parent survey to inform inspection judgements.

Inspection team

Georgina Beasley, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sue Rath

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Thomas Russell Junior School is larger than average.
- Nearly all pupils come from White British backgrounds. A very small proportion is from different ethnic minority backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well below the national average.
- The proportions of pupils supported at school action, and at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are above average.
- There is a breakfast club at the school and it is managed by the governing body. This was part of this inspection and findings are included in this report.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expected standard for pupils' attainment and progress.
- An acting deputy headteacher started in September 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate learning and progress in writing further by:
 - planning activities that motivate boys to write so that they achieve as well in writing as they do in reading and mathematics
 - always checking with pupils during, and not just at the end of lessons, that they are using planned vocabulary and the strategies authors use to create meaning, mood and effect.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by ensuring teachers always:
 - focus lesson objectives sharply on the planned learning not on the task to be completed
 - ensure that tasks are sufficiently challenging, particularly for the more-able pupils
 - share learning objectives with pupils so that they know what must be achieved and what success looks like.
- Develop leadership and management by:
 - ensuring the school development plan contains precise performance measures against which success can be evaluated
 - developing the roles of the special educational needs, English and mathematics leaders, to better support the headteacher and deputy headteacher in checking that planned improvements are suitably raising standards and accelerating pupils' progress
 - ensure the governing body has all of the relevant information about pupils' progress to inform intervention and target action precisely and strategically to secure improvements, particularly in teaching and learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils **requires improvement**

- Attainment is rising steadily. Pupils are now sustaining their high attainment from the start of Year 3 to the end of Year 4 in reading, writing and mathematics because most make the expected progress in Year 3 and good progress in Year 4. As a result, pupils are starting in Years 4 and 5 this academic year with higher levels of attainment than previously.
- Most pupils make the expected progress over time and in lessons. Pupils' progress is inconsistent because teaching quality varies. The progress of some more-able writers now in Year 6 has been too slow in the past. Some boys do less well in writing than they do in reading and mathematics because they lack the motivation to write.
- Pupils read widely in many subjects and their achievement in reading is good. Boys and girls enjoyed this year's summer reading challenge because the list of recommended books met a wide range of interests. Fewer boys took part in the summer home writing activity because they were not so interested in taking part.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make the expected progress over time. They make good progress when they work with a teacher or teaching assistant individually or in small groups.
- Pupils eligible for pupil premium make similar progress as their classmates. The school tracks their learning closely to ensure that they receive the support that they need to rectify any gaps in their learning and that they engage with the full range of curricular activities on offer.
- Pupils use computers and touchpad technology confidently to research the internet and to suitably record their work in different ways. As a result, they have good computer skills by the end of Year 6. Pupils talk animatedly about the curriculum topics and visits they make and acknowledge that enrichment activities make learning more interesting and fun.

The quality of teaching **requires improvement**

- Teaching has improved but still varies too much across the school to be good or better overall. Good and sometimes outstanding lessons were observed in all year groups.
- Teachers' lesson planning includes tasks for different abilities. Activities are sometimes too easy for some pupils. Teaching is most effective when it makes sure that all pupils whatever their abilities are supported and/or challenged throughout the lesson to reach their capabilities. Teaching assistants support those who find learning difficult well and this ensures that pupils engage with learning and achieve what is expected.
- The teaching of reading is good and pupils have a good understanding of the sounds that letters make. Teachers help pupils understand how authors choose words and phrases to create atmosphere and meaning in stories. Pupils learn how to read between the lines to gain a good understanding of the author's intent.
- When pupils are writing, teachers do not always check that pupils are using the planned

vocabulary and the strategies authors use to create meaning, mood and effect.

- The positive climate in all classrooms encourages pupils to ask for help if they get stuck and to have a go when they are given something new to try.
- Lesson objectives occasionally focus on what pupils will do rather than on what they will learn. For example, stating 'write a descriptive poem' rather than clearly specifying what teachers want pupils to achieve in their writing such as using particular vocabulary or improving their grammar. Consequently, pupils do not always know what must be achieved and what success looks like. The learning intention does not become apparent until they check their work with teachers at the end of lessons. This limits pupils' potential progress. Good and better teaching checks learning during lessons and ensures that pupils follow clear success criteria to achieve well.
- Teachers give pupils clear feedback when marking finished pieces of work. This means pupils know how well they have done and what must be improved. They understand the marking symbols used and always use their 'polishing pens' to make the necessary improvements and to respond appropriately to any comments made.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' positive relationships with adults, and each other, promote effectively their high levels of self-confidence to express their views and to say when they do and do not like something. For example, pupils are fully involved in evaluating the current family dining and putting forward ideas for improvement. Pupils are polite and courteous to visitors, adults and to each other.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Pupils like 'Golden Time', (a thirty minute slot every Friday afternoon when they can choose a favourite activity) and understand why they lose this benefit if they do not behave well. Pupils are proud to collect house points for good achievement and behaviour, and celebrate others' achievements positively.
- Pupils have good opportunity to take responsibility for their learning and their behaviour. Most check their work and diligently follow the success criteria when given, as to how to set out and present their work. They take on leadership roles enthusiastically and all strive to be given a green or red hat to wear when acting as eco-warriors or friendship ambassadors.
- Pupils feel safe, secure and are well cared for. They say bullying does not exist. They know what constitutes different kinds of bullying, including cyber-bullying. For example, they understand how to stay safe when researching different websites on the internet.
- High attendance has been sustained since the previous inspection. Pupils arrive on time, ready to learn. The breakfast club is well attended and gives pupils a positive start to the day. They take part in a varied range of games and activities, sometimes selected and planned themselves. Club provision makes a positive contribution to their personal and social development.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher has an accurate view of teaching across the school and is clear about what

needs to be improved. Since the information has become available, she has developed a clear set of improvement targets measured by pupils' progress this academic year. These are now ready to be included in the school's development plan.

- The local authority has given good support in the school's drive to strengthen the quality of teaching. Training for teachers and teaching assistants on how to ask probing questions and how to give effective feedback to pupils has been particularly successful because both aspects are consistent strengths in teaching.
 - The school has the capacity to improve, as demonstrated through rising standards in reading and mathematics as a result of improved teaching; however, improvement has been hindered by considerable disruptions to staffing. A whole-team commitment is evident but disruption has resulted in improvement being driven mainly by the headteacher until recently.
 - The headteacher and acting deputy headteacher check pupils' progress closely and identify what needs to be done to improve school outcomes. They are starting to use the performance information to target further improvements in learning and to identify more focused training and to set improvement targets for individual teachers. Performance information is not used so effectively to set measurable targets in the school development plan, against which to evaluate the success of its actions, or to link pay awards to pupils' achievement.
 - The leadership of special educational needs and subjects has improved. Leaders' involvement in checking pupils' progress, especially more-able pupils and those pupils identified with special educational needs at school action is not fully embedded. There is insufficient checking that planned improvements are making enough difference to pupils' progress.
 - The school's promotion of equal opportunities is not yet good because more-able pupils are not always given hard enough work to help them improve, particularly in writing. Nevertheless, gaps in pupils' performance are narrowing compared to national averages, particularly in reading and mathematics.
 - The introduction of a new curriculum ensures rich and varied curricular activities promote pupils' interest and good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development which helps build important life skills and personal qualities. For example, a recent visit to a mosque helped pupils in Year 5 gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of the religion of Islam. Such activities are effective in promoting a sense of tolerance and are helpful in tackling discrimination.
 - The pupil premium budget is allocated to give the right sort of support to those pupils that are eligible. The school provides extra teaching support when progress slows and checks to make sure it is making a difference. As a result, pupils' progress improved last year.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors ensure that parents are well-informed about the school's work. The majority of parents recognise the improvement in this aspect since the previous inspection.
 - The Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body meet with the headteacher regularly to discuss pupil progress and the quality of teaching. They report to the full governing body to ensure all members are involved in decision-making. In response to the underachievement of the current Year 6, it has authorised the organisation of the year group into three smaller classes to help pupils regain their above average attainment from Year 3. This decision was not made last year because precise information about pupil progress was insufficiently detailed.
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What inspection judgements mean

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

School details

Unique reference number	124150
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	402231

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community School
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	241
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Terry Wells
Headteacher	Shelley Sharpe
Date of previous school inspection	16 June 2010
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