

Whaley Thorns Primary School

Portland Road, Langwith, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, NG20 9HB

Inspection dates

13–14 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

- The headteacher does not delegate enough responsibility for school leadership and improvement to others. This is done with the best of intentions but it is not helping the school to improve quickly enough.
- Subject leadership requires improvement. Leaders have not been required to take full responsibility for improving standards within their subjects.
- Governors do not challenge school leaders strongly enough about pupil progress and school improvement. Their knowledge of the role of a governor needs to be updated.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent. Teachers do not use regular assessment of pupils' knowledge and achievements effectively enough to plan the next steps in their learning.
- Pupils do not achieve as well as they could, especially in writing. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are not always high enough in this subject.
- Teachers do not always match the work they set to pupils' abilities well enough. As a result, some pupils could achieve more, especially the most able.
- Attendance is below average and the proportion of pupils persistently absent has risen in the last year.
- The role of the early years' leader is underdeveloped. The quality of provision and resources for children requires improvement, indoors and outdoors.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders and governors care deeply about the pupils and the importance of the school within its community.
- From low starting points, pupils achieve well by the time they reach the end of Key Stage 1.
- Pupils take part in projects that support their community and this helps to prepare them for life beyond the school gates.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of school leadership by:
 - developing the leadership skills of subject leaders
 - delegating more responsibility to subject leaders
 - clearly identifying roles and responsibilities so that it is easier for school leaders to hold colleagues to account for the achievement of pupils.

- Increase the impact of governors on school improvement by:
 - ensuring that they are equipped with the skills and knowledge to challenge school leaders effectively.

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that it is consistently good, or better, by:
 - making sure that teachers use ongoing assessment of what pupils can do to match work to pupils' abilities, especially the more able
 - holding teachers to account for the progress of each pupil on a more regular basis
 - consistently applying whole school policies and practice to marking and the presentation of pupils' work
 - applying the skills, particularly writing skills, that pupils learn in lessons across a wider range of subjects
 - improving the quality of adult questioning to deepen pupils' understanding and extend the range of vocabulary they use
 - raising teachers' expectations and aspirations for all pupils, particularly in writing.

- Reduce the number of days lost through pupil absence by:
 - ensuring that parents play their part by sending their children to school regularly, and continuing to enforce sanctions on unauthorised absences and term-time holidays.

- Improve provision in the early years by:
 - providing training to develop effective leadership
 - ensuring that planning is always informed by what the children can already do so that expectations are always high and all children are effectively challenged
 - improving the quality of resources, both indoors and outdoors.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher has taken on too many roles and responsibilities. She has done this believing that it was the right thing to do to support her staff. However, too much monitoring and school improvement relies on her involvement and decision making, and the roles of other leaders have not been sufficiently developed.
 - Subject leaders are in place but they are not clear about their responsibilities. They undertake many of the roles expected of leaders in their position, such as monitoring the work in pupils' books. However, their work has not had enough impact on raising pupil achievement, particularly in writing. Subject leaders do not hold teachers to account or have challenging conversations with colleagues when pupils underperform.
 - The headteacher and her team care deeply about the pupils and the local community. This is clear from the relationships between adults and pupils during most of the school day. Leaders and staff do not tolerate discrimination of any kind and every effort is made to ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils. However, too much emphasis on care has sometimes overshadowed the importance of stretching pupils' knowledge and understanding.
 - Leaders are aware of the need to improve pupil outcomes by the time they leave Year 6. They have analysed annual information and made important decisions from this. For example, in response to the drop in writing achievement, the curriculum has been overhauled to ensure that pupils get more opportunities to apply their learning in different situations.
 - Leaders are taking this curriculum change as an opportunity to ensure that pupils are taught about fundamental British values such as democracy, respect and tolerance for others. Pupils are also alerted to the dangers of extremism in all its forms and taught to keep themselves safe online.
 - The school's caring values support pupils' social, moral, cultural and spiritual well-being. There is a range of enrichment activities, which highlight the needs of people who are less fortunate, for example providing Christmas presents for children in other countries through Operation Christmas.
 - School leaders use additional funding such as the pupil premium and the sports and physical education grant to offer wider opportunities to pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged. This has ensured that all pupils have an opportunity to be included in events and activities. Leaders monitor the impact of these grants and adjust how they are used to make sure that they continue to provide good value for money. The school offers a number of extra-curricular activities for different age groups and these alter during the year.
 - Parental views of the school are not entirely positive, and inspectors looked closely at possible areas of concern. However, they found that the vast majority of these concerns were unfounded, although some may be the result of limited or confused communication between school and home.
 - The school has received very limited support from the local authority in recent years and this has had an impact on school improvement. This was due, in part, to an overestimation of the school's effectiveness which was shared between the local authority and school leaders. Additional support has recently been identified but not yet implemented.
- **The governance of the school**
- Governors visit the school regularly and take part in monitoring lessons and pupils' work. They use this information to help them understand the work of the school. Records of governing body meetings suggest that governors do not probe or test the headteacher's view of the school thoroughly. This means that they have an inflated view of some aspects of the school. Nevertheless, they know and are able to outline the school's actions to address the main priorities for school improvement.
 - Governors play a part in the management of teachers' performance and know their responsibilities in relation to the use of the pupil premium and physical education and sports grants. However, they need to exert more challenge over the decisions made by senior leaders and scrutinise the impact of this funding in greater detail.
 - Governors are ambitious for the children and are keenly aware of the vital role the school plays in this community. Nevertheless, they still need to address gaps in their knowledge and understanding of their role. For this reason, the school would benefit from an external review of governance.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Senior leaders review practices to ensure that the school meets statutory requirements. Recording of incidents or concerns about pupils' welfare or behaviour are well documented. Leaders are being vigilant for children who may be at risk from harm through family crises such as domestic or substance abuse. They are particularly alert to children missing from education and the potential risk of child exploitation.
- Leaders ensure that all necessary training, such as first aid and safeguarding, is up to date. They maintain and regularly update policies and procedures on safeguarding and health and safety issues. Risk assessments are in place and the majority of parents speak highly of the care given to their children when they have an additional health or learning needs.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school is inconsistent. Where teaching is less strong, teachers' lack of subject knowledge means that they are not clear on the next steps in pupils' learning.
- Teachers do not use regular assessment well enough to inform the next steps in learning for pupils. Lessons are often built around activities rather than learning needs. Consequently, tasks are not always matched closely to pupils' needs, particularly the most able. Teachers do not consistently extend pupils' thinking or deepen their understanding by using challenging and thought-provoking questions.
- The tracking and monitoring of pupils' progress has been too informal in the past. Opportunities for leaders to challenge teachers about pupil performance have been missed. Additionally, this monitoring has not focused enough on the outcomes of specific groups of pupils such as the more able. Leaders have begun to address this and staff understand the importance of this information in ensuring that no pupil falls behind.
- In both English and mathematics, there is insufficient evidence of pupils applying the skills and knowledge they have learned. There is an overemphasis on pupils' learning by repeating facts or using techniques which they do not fully understand. Pupils also commented on repeating learning from previous years, in mathematics, for example. Pupils are rarely expected to extend their answers to questions from adults. This limits opportunities to expand their vocabulary choices and develop greater maturity in their thinking.
- Teachers do not consistently apply whole-school policies on handwriting, the presentation of work in books and teacher marking and feedback to ensure the highest expectations of every pupil. This means that pupils are not always expected to do their best work in every lesson.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are high. The presentation of their work is better and pupils are given time to respond to marking and teacher feedback. Particularly good examples of this were seen in pupils' writing books from the Year 4/5 class. Pupils are given time to reflect on the thought-provoking questions in the teacher's marking and feedback and are expected to respond.
- Observations in this class also showed that the teacher had used his knowledge of what pupils had learned in a previous mathematics lesson to inform his planning. Pupils were clear about what they were learning, and the teacher acted quickly to address misconceptions. This allowed pupils to make good progress.
- Teaching assistants generally offer good support to pupils in each class. They use a range of questions and strategies, guiding pupils towards expressing their own ideas and decisions.
- The vast majority of parents are satisfied with teaching in the school and the amount of homework set. They are particularly positive about the good start they feel their children get when they enter the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare require improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement. Some pupils do not attend school as often as they should. This absence is often condoned by parents who choose to take family holidays in term time or do not send their children to school. The result is that learning is lost and these pupils do not make as much progress as they could. School leaders take

appropriate action to impose sanctions on poor attending families and must continue to do so in each case.

- Pupils are punctual and enjoy coming to school, wearing their uniforms with pride. They treat the school building, staff and visitors with respect. In lessons, pupils respond appropriately to adult instruction and comply with school rules. Usually, pupils have good attitudes to learning. Where this is not the case, it is because work is not matched closely to their ability and this leads to some low level disruption and disengagement from the lesson.
- Older pupils show a mature attitude and respect for each other. They are involved in decision making through the school council and support the school's efforts to ensure it is a safe and welcoming place for all by volunteering for the 'Friendship Team'. In this, they work alongside adults to promote tolerance and respect for others. Pupils also take part in initiatives to support children in other countries and closer to home, for example through the local foodbank. Their involvement in these initiatives helps to promote pupils' social, moral and cultural education.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Pupils behave well during lessons and when under direct supervision because adults apply behaviour expectations and rules consistently across the school. At these times, inspectors found pupils to be polite and well mannered. However, at other times of the day, such as lining up and entering the dining hall, they are less controlled. The dining hall is a noisy place, with some pupils lacking the skills and table manners necessary to make eating a pleasant social experience.
- There is some boisterous behaviour at playtimes, but inspectors saw no evidence of bullying or the use of derogatory or offensive name calling. Pupils also said that this is a friendly and welcoming school where they feel safe and respected by others.
- Leaders keep records of poor behaviour and any incidents that show pupils' intolerance to others. These records are well documented and show that everyone involved has had their say. Records also show that leaders and teachers follow up incidents with parents or the appropriate authorities, where necessary.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Pupils do not achieve well enough in their writing. This is the same at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Teacher expectations are too low in this subject and pupils should be expected to achieve more.
- Children's physical development and self-care skills are often under-developed when they enter the Nursery and Reception classes. Their communication, literacy and mathematical skills are well below that which is typical for children of their age. In 2015, around one third of children left the Reception class with good levels of development.
- There is an improving trend in outcomes for the Year 1 national phonics screening test. In 2015, the figure exceeded the national average and represented an improvement on the previous year.
- By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' progress has accelerated and, in 2015, all children attained at levels that were at least broadly average for their age in reading and mathematics. Attainment in writing was lower but exceeded the national average and showed signs of improvement over previous years. The proportion of pupils attaining at above average for their age is close to the national average.
- Pupil progress slows in Key Stage 2. In 2015, the proportion of pupils working at levels which were average or above average increased in mathematics and writing. However, in the case of writing, this was still well below the national average. A much smaller proportion of pupils attained at above average levels in reading, writing and mathematics, and these figures dropped below the national average. The proportion of pupils making expected and more than expected progress throughout Key Stage 2 was below the national figure.
- Disadvantaged pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics is similar to that of other pupils nationally in Key Stage 1 and 2, but the gap increases as they move through the school. However, the majority of these pupils make more than expected progress during Key Stage 2.
- Work in pupils' books shows limited progress during the early part of the current term, with inconsistencies in the quality of presentation and marking. Some of the work lacks challenge and involves too much repetition of tasks that pupils can already do well or have done in previous years, for example in mathematics books.

- Pupils of different ages and abilities can read at levels which are appropriate for their age. Younger pupils use their phonics knowledge to help them to read words, although they sometimes lack confidence and the wide range of phonic skills expected for their age. There is not a culture of reading for pleasure or enjoyment.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- Children enter the Nursery and Reception class with skills that are often below, and sometimes significantly below, those typical for their age. By the time they leave Reception, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is well below that seen nationally. As a result, the majority are not well prepared for entry into Key Stage 1, particularly in their literacy and mathematical skills.
- The early years' leader is a temporary postholder. She is passionate about the importance of this stage in children's learning but her leadership skills are under-developed. She has emerging ideas of how early years might be improved but is restricted by limitations in the building and the quality of teaching resources. The recent amalgamation of the Nursery into the main school has not met with universal approval from parents. However, the children have settled well and adopted new routines quickly.
- The teacher and teaching assistants make accurate assessments of children's learning. However, these observations are not always used effectively to inform planning or to identify next steps for individual children. This sometimes means that children are taking part in activities that are too easy for them. Where this is the case, some children lose interest quickly and this leads to them flitting from one activity to another.
- Safeguarding in the early years is effective and children are happy and eager to learn. Relationships with staff are very positive and this enables children to settle quickly. Children are supported to develop independence, quickly learning self-help skills such as dressing themselves and self-selecting their snacks. Key workers are very effective in providing security and comfort for children in the Nursery. Children of different ages mix well and show that they can work and behave well together.
- Good quality questioning by the teacher and teaching assistants extends the children's understanding and vocabulary. Consequently, when working in small adult-led groups, children make better progress than when accessing independent activities.
- Outdoor provision is not being fully utilised and the current layout is not conducive to learning. Few resources are available to stimulate writing or the use of numbers.

School details

Unique reference number	112793
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	10005640

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.

School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Zoe Ellis
Headteacher	Kay Walker
Telephone number	01623 742604
Website	www.schoolswire.co.uk/public/whaley566.html
Email address	info@whaleythorns.derbyshire.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	22–23 November 2011

Information about this school

- Whaley Thorns Primary School is smaller than the average primary school. The number of pupils has dropped significantly in recent years.
- Pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. This includes children in Reception, who attend full-time, and children in the Nursery, who attend each morning.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and there are very small numbers of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is well above the national average. This funding provides extra support for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after children.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below the national average.
- In 2014 and 2015 the school met national floor targets for Key Stage 2 achievement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all classes, covering every year group. Two observations were undertaken jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. They observed the teaching of early reading skills and listened to pupils reading. Inspectors talked to pupils about their school and looked at examples of pupils' work in all year groups to gain a view of the impact of teaching over time.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, subject leaders, representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke to parents informally at the start of the school day as well as receiving three telephone calls from parents. They took account of the 18 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents including: the school's own self-evaluation of its current performance and plans for improvement; the school's most recent information on the achievement and progress of pupils; information relating to the safeguarding of pupils; the school's most recent information relating to the attendance of pupils and the minutes from meetings of the governing body.
- The inspectors considered the range and quality of information provided on the school's website.

Inspection team

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