

Inspection of a good school: Thomas Johnson Lower School

Hurst Grove, Lidlington, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK43 0SB

Inspection dates: 30 October 2019

Outcome

Thomas Johnson Lower School continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Thomas Johnson Lower School are looked after and cared for. Staff know pupils well.

Pupils are happy, feel safe and say any bullying is dealt with. Pupils are well supported by adults. Leaders, governors and staff give a high priority to safety and welfare.

Leaders promote their chosen values-based approach to well-being and personal development. The school's values represent personal qualities that leaders most want pupils to develop. They include, for example, responsibility, cooperation and tolerance.

There are high expectations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The inclusion of pupils with SEND is a strength. These pupils are supported well by adults.

While there are pupils who know and follow the school's behaviour systems, there are occasions when some pupils do not behave well both in the classroom and during breaktimes.

Children get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes. Children confidently take part in a range of well-planned and purposeful activities.

The curriculum is not well sequenced in all subjects throughout the school. Pupils in key stage 1 and key stage 2 are not consistently learning the knowledge they need to develop their skills and understanding in all subjects.

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

Pupils are developing secure phonics knowledge and early reading skills. Staff have good subject knowledge. Pupils develop a love of reading, regardless of their starting points. Pupils say they 'love' reading books, both at home and at school. Those pupils who need support to catch up are provided with extra sessions. However, pupils who already read well are not always considered when teachers plan their reading lessons.

Expectations of pupils' achievement in writing are not high enough. Pupils are not given enough opportunities to practise their grammar and handwriting skills.

Pupils have daily opportunities to practise their basic mathematics skills. Mathematics lessons provide extra challenge for those who need it. Pupils say they would like these challenges to be harder. The mathematics curriculum includes the importance of learning basic mathematics concepts and knowing the right mathematical vocabulary.

Regular science lessons give pupils the chance to develop their investigation skills, for example through active sessions outdoors, which pupils enjoy. These are effectively taught.

Leaders are at the early stages of developing a well-planned curriculum in all subjects. Currently, the planning for all subject areas is not fully thought through to make sure pupils develop their knowledge effectively in all areas. There are few clearly planned sequences of learning based on pupils' starting points in most subjects. Sometimes work is repeated. Pupils do not build on what they have learned previously. For example, adjectives were taught similarly in Years 1, 2, 3 and 4. Leaders, including governors are not checking well enough how effective the curriculum is.

While pupils generally achieve at least as well as others nationally, cohorts of pupils are small, so this does vary year on year.

The needs of pupils with SEND are considered in all activities. Pupils with SEND are supported well with extra prompts and additional adults to help them. Pupils with SEND are included in all activities. Over time, there are improvements in attendance and achievement for pupils with SEND.

Staff workload and their well-being are considered. Teachers told inspectors that there has been a focus on this. Staff feel well-supported.

Personal development of both pupils and staff is a high priority at the school through the school's values-based approach. This includes consideration of pupils' self-esteem and mental health. Most parents are positive about the school's work.

Classroom routines are well-established. In most year groups, pupils understand what staff expect of them. Behaviour is appropriate in most classes, but in some lessons lack of attention and silliness interrupt learning. Pupils told inspectors this is quite common and spoke of disruption in lessons which teachers do not always deal with.

At lunch and breaktimes behaviour is not always good. Not all staff follow the school's behaviour policy and too often actions by pupils go unchecked. For example, boisterous behaviour in the dining hall resulted in a very noisy atmosphere. This does not support school leaders' intended aim of developing social conversation and good manners. Pupils report that lunchtimes are usually like this. At breaktimes, while pupils know the rules some of them choose to ignore them.

The early years setting provides a purposeful, language-rich learning environment. Children enjoy the activities on offer. They are well supported by adults who successfully work to develop children's language, vocabulary and numeracy skills.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Before adults start work in the school, leaders and governors make sure suitability checks are carried out. All staff receive regular, high-quality training. Staff can spot any signs that might worry them about a pupil's welfare. Staff talk to leaders about any concerns they have. Leaders follow these up quickly. School logs and records, including bullying incidents, are thorough and action taken to follow them up.

Pupils say they feel safe and know who to go to if they have any worries or concerns. Systems for keeping pupils safe online are clear and pupils know what to look out for.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's curriculum is not sufficiently sequenced or coherent in all subjects. Leaders need to ensure that curriculum plans for all subjects are mapped out, providing training for teachers about what pupils should know and when they should teach it. This will enable teachers to build pupils' knowledge sequentially, over time. Leaders should check that pupils are learning more, remembering more and building on their prior learning in all subjects as they progress through the school.
- Leaders and governors are not regularly checking that the curriculum subjects are planned well so pupils achieve as best they can in all subjects. Leaders need to ensure that their monitoring of the curriculum is rigorous and effective, so they know what is being taught and how effectively throughout the school.
- Expectations of how pupils behave are not high enough. Adults do not consistently use the behaviour systems in place to reinforce the expected standard of behaviour. Leaders need to raise expectations of behaviour in all situations, including around the school, so that pupils take responsibility for themselves and are ready to learn. Furthermore, leaders need to ensure that all staff adhere to the school's expectations and policies on behaviour so they are routinely met and effectively used.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2011.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	109468
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10110279
Type of school	First
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	73
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Tim Mason
Headteacher	Marian Haimes
Website	www.thomasjohnsonschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	23 February 2016

Information about this school

- Thomas Johnson Lower School is a much smaller than average school.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence during the inspection from visiting lessons, talking to pupils and looking at their work, having discussions with leaders, governors, staff, the local authority representative and looking at a range of the school's documentation. Many of the inspection activities were carried out jointly with school leaders.
- Reading, mathematics and science were looked at in depth during the inspection. This included discussions with school leaders and governors about curriculum planning, delivery and standards. Curriculum leaders, class teachers and pupils were also asked for their views.
- There were insufficient responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, to be considered, although eight parents responded by free-text and one by letter. Inspectors looked at results from a recent school survey of parents' views. An inspector talked with parents at the end of the school day to gather their views.

- No pupils responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire. Eleven members of staff responded to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and these responses were considered by inspectors.

Inspection team

Jacqueline Bell-Cook, lead inspector Ofsted Inspector

Helen Jones Ofsted Inspector

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