

Inspection of Thomas Johnson Lower School

Hurst Grove, Lidlington, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK43 0SB

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 November 2022

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| The quality of education | Good |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Good |
| Personal development | Good |
| Leadership and management | Good |
| Early years provision | Good |
| Previous inspection grade | Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 |

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Thomas Johnson Lower are happy and get along well with one another. Everyone, including those who are new to the school, feels included and welcomed. The school is recognised for being at the heart of its community.

From the moment children join the early years, the school's values of 'dream, discover and flourish' are interwoven in their day-to-day lives in all they do. Pupils respond positively to the high expectations staff promote and typically behave well. Bullying hardly ever happens. If pupils have any worries, they can tell a trusted adult and know that they will be well supported. As a result, pupils feel safe at school.

The curriculum supports pupils to achieve well. This includes those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). In most subjects, the curriculum is organised thoughtfully to ensure pupils build securely on what they have learned before.

Pupils' achievements are recognised and rewarded in several ways. House points, attendance awards and recognition for when pupils demonstrate school values, all help to create a harmonious school community. Relationships between pupils and adults are positive. Parents appreciate this. As one parent said, 'It is clear the staff at Thomas Johnson know their pupils.'

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

Leaders have carefully considered the curriculum content. They have high aspirations for all pupils. Leaders check the curriculum in all subject areas and are continuing to develop and implement the ambitious curriculum they have in place. In most subjects, including English and mathematics, the curriculum is carefully planned and well taught. There remain a few subjects where plans are less detailed. This makes it more difficult for teachers to know what pupils have learned before.

Pupils with SEND are supported to access the same curriculum as other pupils. Pupils' needs are identified accurately. Additional effective training is put in place for staff to ensure they are able to adapt their teaching to support pupils with SEND well. Consequently, pupils with SEND achieve well alongside their peers.

Leaders have designed and put in place a clear phonics and reading programme. Children in the early years begin learning the sounds letters make as soon as they start school. By the time they are in Year 1, pupils use their knowledge to read words of increasing complexity. Most pupils read books that are closely matched to their phonics knowledge. When and if pupils fall behind, teachers provide timely support to enable them to catch up quickly.

Leaders promote a love of reading by sharing high-quality texts. This helps pupils to become confident and fluent readers.

In the early years classes, children meet the high expectations set for them. This includes settling into routines quickly so that they learn well. The curriculum for early years is as ambitious as for the rest of the school. This includes a focus on early mathematical and language skills. The curriculum ensures that children are well prepared for the move to Year 1. Staff build strong relationships with children and their families.

Pupils are friendly and polite. They understand what is expected of them. Pupils behave well in lessons. They pay attention and concentrate on the tasks they have been set. This ensures that there is no disruption to learning. When introducing changes, leaders have thought carefully about how to reinforce school values and those of society. For example, recent improvements to the behaviour system were linked to British values.

Leaders continue to evaluate and extend how they cater for pupils' wider development. The school provides opportunities for pupils to visit places of worship and to take part in first-hand experiences such as Bollywood dancing and cooking traditional Jewish food. These opportunities help pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Pupils' understanding of democracy is enhanced through the selection of school council members and the house captains. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about recent changes but would like more opportunities for their children to attend clubs.

Staff say that they are proud to work at the school. They appreciate the consideration that leaders give to their workload.

Leaders, including governors, know the school's strengths and areas to improve. A review by new leaders has identified that not all leadership roles are as clearly defined as they need to be to ensure all leaders are able to carry out their role effectively. While new leaders are effective, the roles and responsibilities are being considered. As a result, this is starting to contribute successfully towards improving all aspects of leaders' work.

Governors play an active role in the life of the school and speak to pupils to gauge opinions. They are clear about how to improve the school. Governors are accessing training to further develop their effectiveness. This is ensuring that they are increasingly able to support leaders in their work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have created a culture where staff care about pupils deeply. Leaders provide staff with high-quality training and frequent updates. Staff understand their responsibility to report any concern, however slight. They are aware of the latest statutory guidance.

Pupils are taught about how to keep themselves safe in a range of settings, for example around railway lines and when online.

Leaders make the necessary checks on adults at the school to ensure that they are suitable to work with children.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have prioritised some subject areas over others to ensure that pupils build upon their basic skills. In a small number of curriculum areas, plans are less well structured. Leaders need to continue to ensure that the content in every subject plan is set out clearly.
- Leadership roles and responsibilities of leaders have not been defined well enough. This means that some staff are not sure about how they can be fully effective in their roles. Senior leaders, including governors, need to continue to develop and define clear roles and responsibilities to ensure all leaders know how they can successfully contribute towards the school's success.

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](#)' 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

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| Unique reference number | 109468 |
| Local authority | Central Bedfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10240988 |
| 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 | 98 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governing body | Tim Mason |
| Headteacher | Simon Bolger |
| Website | www.thomasjohnsonschool.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 30 October 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- Thomas Johnson Lower School is a much smaller than average school.
- School leaders do not currently make use of any alternative provision for pupils.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior teacher, the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator, four governors, and representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning

and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspector also listened to a sample of pupils from Years 1 to 3 read to a member of staff.

- To inspect safeguarding, the inspector met the designated safeguarding lead, and reviewed documents and records, including the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks.
- The inspectors also reviewed other school documentation, including policies and development plans.
- To gather the views of pupils, the inspectors spoke to groups of pupils, including in lessons, at breaktime and at lunchtime. No pupils responded to the pupil survey.
- To gather the views of parents, the inspectors spoke to some parents and reviewed the 40 responses and 38 free-text responses submitted to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View.
- To gather the views of staff, the inspectors spoke to several staff. The inspectors also took account of the eight responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Simon Eardley, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Linda Bartlett

Ofsted Inspector

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