

Inspection of Thornford CofE Primary School

Boot Lane, Thornford, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 6QY

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 November 2024

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The headteacher of the school is Kirsty Blencowe. This school is part of Sherborne Area Schools' Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, David Watson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Middleton. There is also an executive headteacher, Ian Bartle, who is responsible for this school and three others.

Ofsted has not previously inspected Thornford CofE Primary School under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged Thornford Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School to be outstanding for overall effectiveness, before it opened as Thornford CofE Primary School as a result of conversion to academy status. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school's golden thread of 'treat others as you would like to be treated yourself' filters down from leaders to staff to pupils. This has created a culture of kindness and compassion. The school is warm and supportive where everyone feels welcome. As a result, pupils are happy and safe, and they attend very well.

Pupils' behaviour is impeccable. Routines, including in the Reception Year, are quickly established and well embedded. Pupils show excellent attitudes to learning in the classroom. At social times, pupils of all ages play together harmoniously. They share equipment, organise games and make sure that everyone is included.

The school has high expectations. Pupils regularly meet these. For example, in Year 1, pupils achieve well in the published phonics outcomes. In Year 6, national test results are typically above average.

The school's work on pupils' personal development is exceptional. The way that the school teaches pupils about character helps them develop their resilience, confidence and curiosity. Pupils benefit greatly from an extensive range of sport, music, performance, outdoor education, trips and visits that support the planned curriculum and broaden pupils' cultural capital.

Parents overwhelmingly recommend the school.

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

The school has developed a curriculum that is broad and balanced. It has identified the important knowledge pupils need to learn over time. This starts in the early years and progressively builds as pupils move up through the school. For example, in mathematics, children in the Reception Year learn to count and recognise shapes. Older pupils develop their knowledge of number and use resources, such as number shapes, to develop their mathematical understanding. By the time pupils get to Year 6, they are able to solve more complex calculations involving fractions.

For most subjects, staff check what pupils know and learn. This enables them to provide suitable learning activities that deepen pupils' knowledge. However, in a minority of subjects, the checks that staff make on pupils' understanding are not used to inform future learning. This means that some pupils can develop misconceptions or gaps in their knowledge.

The school prioritises reading and pupils' vocabulary development. This begins in the Reception Year, where children learn the sounds that they need to decode words to read. This prepares them well to learn to read with accuracy and fluency during key stage 1. Staff ensure that pupils' early reading books match their stage of learning. Older pupils practise reading regularly and enjoy class story times where their teachers read interesting and challenging books to them. As pupils move through the school, their love of reading grows because of the support that the school provides.

The school quickly identifies pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It works with other agencies, such as educational psychologists and speech and language therapists, who provide advice, so pupils with SEND receive the right support. Staff use this advice and adapt learning so that pupils with SEND achieve well.

Attendance is high. The school analyses attendance carefully and intervenes with support or follow-up actions as required. Strong relationships with families begin in the early years. The school challenges and supports those pupils whose attendance falls below the school's high expectations.

The school places equal importance on pupils' academic success and their character development. Strong relationships sit at the heart of this. Pupils behave consistently well with high levels of self-control. The school ethos is grounded in nurturing values and clear structures of support. Older pupils carry out leadership roles that support the life of the school. These include eco-ambassadors and senior pupils. Pupils take pride in these positions as they are seen as the pinnacle of success within the school.

The wider development opportunities for pupils are exceptional. Community projects, educational trips and residential visits enable pupils to thrive. Pupils learn about the world beyond their community. For example, they enjoy writing to their pen pals in France and then welcoming them to the school on exchange visits. The school ensures that pupils value diversity and different ways of life. Pupils discuss issues related to discrimination and equality with respect. Pupils speak with maturity about inspirational people, such as Rosa Parks and Michelle Obama, when discussing issues such as discrimination and equality.

The local academy committee are knowledgeable about the school's work. They consider the well-being and workload of leaders, teachers and support staff well. The trust is committed to ensuring that pupils can participate fully in school life.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the school's approach to assessment does not provide enough information about what pupils have learned and remembered. As a result, some pupils develop gaps in their knowledge. The school should modify its approach so that checks on pupils' learning more consistently inform future teaching and, therefore, reduce gaps in pupils' knowledge.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	144415
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10344801
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	99
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Middleton
CEO of the trust	David Weston
Headteacher	Ian Bartle (executive headteacher) Kirsty Blencowe (head of school)
Website	www.thornford.dorset.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The executive headteacher and the head of school joined in September 2024.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school offers a breakfast club for its pupils.
- The school is a Church of England school, within the diocese of Salisbury. Its last inspection under section 48 took place in June 2017. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place in the 2024/2025 academic year.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form

provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the head of school, school staff, parents and pupils. The lead inspector met with the chief executive of the trust, the interim director of education for the trust, the chair of the trust board and members of the local academy committee. The lead inspector held a telephone call with representatives of the local diocese.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also met with curriculum leaders and looked at pupils' work in other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school, including at lunchtime. In addition, inspectors met with pupils to hear their views.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses. They also considered responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Gavin Summerfield, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Matthew Shanks

Ofsted Inspector

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