

Flax Hill Junior School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	124135
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	380811
Inspection dates	20–21 March 2012
Lead inspector	Susan Barkway

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	264
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Wayne Pell-Walpole
Headteacher	Richard Lane
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2009
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Age group	7-11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Susan Barkway	Additional inspector
Paul Delbridge-Smith	Additional inspector
Brenda Jones	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 20 lessons, spending approximately 10 hours in classrooms, and observed 12 teachers. In addition, inspectors heard pupils read and scrutinised their work books. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff and pupils, and inspectors spoke to a representative from the local authority. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. Questionnaire responses from 99 parents and carers were analysed, together with 95 responses from pupils and 15 from staff. Inspectors scrutinised the arrangements and records kept by the school to safeguard pupils. They also looked at the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, as well as assessment data that teachers use to monitor pupils' progress.

Information about the school

The school is a larger-than-average junior school. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage and none is at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average, as is the proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. The main areas of additional need include moderate or specific learning difficulties, such as speech, language or communication difficulties.

Pupils' attainment meets the current government floor standard for primary schools, which set the minimum expectations for their attainment and progress. The school accommodates a privately managed after-school club which is inspected separately.

Since the last inspection, the school has undergone significant staffing changes. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2010 and four new teachers have joined the school.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. It has improved with increasing rapidity since the previous inspection. Pupils, parents, carers and staff are very positive about the school and how it keeps pupils safe and looks after them. It is not outstanding because, although rapidly improving, pupils' achievement is still satisfactory overall.
- Achievement is satisfactory. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is average. Although progress in the past was unsatisfactory, current pupils made good progress over the last year because of better teaching, and gaps are narrowing quickly between the performances of different groups of pupils.
- Teaching is good and has improved rapidly over the last academic year. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and use a wide range of strategies to engage and motivate them. In better lessons, effective questioning and well-timed interventions ensure that pupils are challenged and able to demonstrate their learning. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and identify how well they have achieved. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to respond to teachers' marking or to self-correct their work in lessons.
- Pupils are extremely well behaved and courteous. The school is a safe, calm and orderly community with a purposeful learning culture. Pupils collaborate well in groups and provide good support to each other. A large majority of parents and carers hold positive views about behaviour and their children's safety.
- Leaders demonstrate an ambitious vision for the school and high expectations for what every pupil and teacher can achieve. The headteacher's strong leadership of a committed staff team and the progress made to improve teaching and achievement demonstrate good capacity for sustained improvement. Recently appointed middle leaders in the school are very clear about their responsibilities but their contribution to school improvement is not yet fully embedded. Performance management procedures contribute well to improvements in teaching and pupils' progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen further the achievements of pupils by:
 - identifying more quickly those pupils who are not making the expected progress in their learning and providing support to ensure that their progress increases
 - monitoring the impact of support and interventions on pupils' outcomes
 - improving marking by making closer links to individual pupils' targets
 - ensuring pupils have the opportunity to respond to teachers' marking and self-correct their work.
- Strengthen further leadership and management by:
 - providing opportunities for all leaders to monitor and evaluate the work of the school, in particular for their area of responsibility
 - holding leaders to account for pupils' progress and improvements to teaching in their area of responsibility.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is in line with national averages by the end of Year 6, but inspectors' observations of lessons show that current pupils' attainment is rising further as a result of better teaching. Progress from their starting points on entry to the junior school is satisfactory, and accelerating, as shown by current accurate assessment, the school's tracking data and inspectors' evidence from lesson observations and work scrutiny. Improvements to the quality of teaching, particularly in the last academic year, along with effective interventions, are making a significant contribution to rising attainment and consistent progress. In most lessons, pupils are motivated, concentrate well and are engaged well in their learning. They work effectively on their own and with others and take responsibility for their learning.

The school has implemented improved procedures for assessing, moderating and tracking pupils' progress throughout the school. This gives a more accurate understanding of the needs of different groups and enables the school to identify pupils who are not making the expected progress. As a result, the gaps in attainment between different groups are narrowing. Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals are making good progress, as are disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. The school has used information from assessments and tracking data effectively to identify further areas of improvement, such as regular and systematic teaching of phonics (how letters represent the sounds in words) to provide more support for pupils who are not making expected progress in reading and writing. Nevertheless, interventions to ensure more rapid progress for individual pupils are not consistently coordinated or monitored in a way that enables the school to evaluate their impact on pupils' outcomes.

Almost all parents and carers who returned inspection questionnaires are very pleased with their children's progress. Typical comments are that they feel their

children have been well supported and are making good progress in their learning.

Quality of teaching

Parents, carers and pupils are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of teaching in the school. Inspectors agree that most of the teaching is good or outstanding and makes a significant contribution to pupils' academic, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Although there is some satisfactory teaching, all inspection evidence indicates that teaching overall has been good for some time, with significant improvements made since the last inspection.

Lessons are planned well with suitably challenging expectations for pupils' learning. Teachers are enthusiastic and have secure subject knowledge. For example, in one lesson, the teacher's own passion for literacy was infectious, ensuring that all pupils were enthused, and her subject knowledge gave her the confidence to challenge and encourage independence in pupils' learning. A strength of the teaching is the opportunities provided for pupils to collaborate and take ownership for their learning. This was particularly effective in a lesson in information and communication technology, where pupils in Year 4 acted as group leaders, coordinating the work of others in their group and reporting back on their achievements.

In most lessons, teachers used a range of teaching strategies, effective questioning and well-timed interventions to assess learning, and to motivate, challenge and support pupils. In the small number of satisfactory lessons observed, there were insufficient opportunities for active engagement by pupils, or for the assessment of their understanding.

The good practice observed during the inspection was reinforced by the quality of pupils' work in books, the school's own extensive monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning, and records of pupils' progress. For example, pupils' work in books shows high expectations of presentation, opportunities for sustained work in writing and encouragement for pupils to make independent choices about the method for calculation in mathematics. As a result, progress in this academic year has been good. Pupils respond very well to these challenges and, on occasions, their behaviour for learning is exemplary.

The quality of marking has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils' work is marked regularly, routinely and consistently. A coding system is used to identify achievements in relation to learning outcomes and most pupils know what they need to do to improve their work. However, there is not enough use of individual pupils' targets to assess progress, and pupils are not always given the opportunity to respond to marking or to demonstrate their ability to self-assess and so improve their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour is good. In lessons, they are engaged and involved in their learning and, even at a young age, demonstrate their ability to collaborate in groups and to work independently. A particular strength is how pupils encourage their peers to be fully involved in group work and how they value others' contributions. Good attitudes

to learning are securely established and demonstrated in the great majority of lessons. Pupils have above-average attendance and are punctual to school and lessons.

Around the school, pupils are exceptionally well behaved, polite and respectful to others. Pupils feel safe in school and have a good understanding of bullying and of how to manage risks, for example when using the internet. Records show that bullying is rare and pupils say that staff are good at dealing with this if it occurs. Parents and carers agree with this view. Although a small number of parents and carers expressed concerns about behaviour, particularly in the playground, inspectors found that behaviour in the playground was good. Pupils are well supervised, play well together and say that they enjoy playtime.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides strong leadership and has high expectations for what every pupil and teacher can achieve. Governors are well informed about strengths and priorities for development and provide very good challenge and support to the headteacher and his senior leadership team. Morale in the school is high. Staff and parents are extremely positive about the direction the school is taking and recognise improvements that have been achieved since the last inspection in terms of the quality of teaching, the progress of pupils, and their behaviour and attendance.

School improvement planning and monitoring now include a range of checks and strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of actions and identifying areas for further improvement. The teaching has been strengthened through systematic monitoring, well-chosen appointments and professional development. This is resulting in much improved practice and good progress for pupils. These demonstrate the school's good capacity to improve further.

The headteacher has recently restructured the leadership team and internal appointments have been made to key positions. The members of staff who have taken on new roles have a good understanding of the responsibilities and expectations and have started to put procedures in place to ensure that they are able to fulfil the role effectively. However, these key leaders are not yet contributing fully to school improvement and the accountability structure is not embedded in the work of the school.

The school's curriculum is broad and balanced and provides good opportunities for pupils to apply their skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. A good example of this is the way in which literacy targets are used to identify achievements when teachers are marking work in other curriculum areas. The school provides good opportunities to promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, in literacy, pupils analyse the difference between right and wrong and consider how feelings are conveyed in facial expressions or through language. In other areas of the curriculum, pupils learn about other cultures or consider the social implications of environmental issues. There is a strong commitment to promoting equality and tackling discrimination and this is reflected by the way in which pupils work together and support each other, as well as in the reduced gaps between the attainment of different groups. In the extended

curriculum, they are encouraged to gain wider experiences through, for example, musical productions and fundraising activities.

The school has effective strategies in place for engaging with parents and carers. Parents and carers report that the headteacher and teaching staff are approachable and respond effectively to concerns. There is very good attendance from parents and carers at sessions to discuss their children's education. There are good systems in place for informing them of any incidents in school. In general, parents and carers report that these work well and records, scrutinised during the inspection, support this view. However, a small number of parents did comment in the inspection questionnaire that they had not been informed of incidents that had occurred. Inspectors found that records of incidents show a relatively large number of minor accidents and senior leaders do not monitor accident logs regularly to check on patterns of accidents.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet current requirements and ensure that pupils feel safe.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



22 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Flax Hill Junior School, Tamworth B79 8QZ

Thank you very much for being so polite and welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed meeting you and seeing how much you were enjoying your lessons. We were particularly impressed by your behaviour and the way in which you worked together in groups. It was wonderful to see you supporting and helping each other! We could see that you were interested in your lessons and were eager to learn more. Your behaviour around the school was also very good but we did notice that there are a lot of accidents at lunchtimes. You could help by making sure that you are aware of the other children around you when you are playing and that you play games which are not too rough.

Although your achievement is satisfactory, you are now making good progress with your reading, writing and mathematics. This is because teachers plan the work you need to help you to go to the next step in your learning. I really enjoyed listening to Year 6 talking about the way we convey our feelings with our facial expressions or through the language we use. It was also pleasing to hear what Year 4 pupils had learnt about e-safety in a lesson about information and communication technology, and to see pupils making decisions and choices about the best way to solve problems in mathematics. We think that you could make even better progress if the teachers worked together to find out who was finding work difficult and agreed what additional help they could give to you. We also think that teachers need to give you the time to correct and improve your work. You can help by making sure that you look at what teachers say when they mark your work so that you know what you need to do to improve.

The headteacher, staff and governors have successfully made improvements since the time of the last inspection, making the school a better place for you to learn. I wish you, your parents, carers, staff and governors the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Susan Barkway
Lead inspector

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