

High Firs Primary School

Court Crescent, Swanley, Kent, BR8 8NR

Inspection dates 19–20 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- The quality of teaching is too inconsistent, especially in Key Stage 2. Not all teaching is good or better over time.
- Too many pupils across the school do not make enough progress in mathematics and phonics (the letters that sounds make).
- Teaching and the pace of learning do not consistently provide the right level of challenge for all, especially the more able.
- Remaining gaps in pupils' achievement are closing, but actions taken by senior leaders and the governing body to reduce them further are not fully robust and effective as middle leaders are not yet held accountable for pupils' progress so that improvements are sustainable.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders and the governing body have worked hard to tackle weaknesses in pupils' achievement particularly in mathematics and phonics. The school has succeeded in raising the percentage of pupils meeting, and exceeding, national tests at the end of Years 2 and 6.
- The behaviour and safety of pupils are good. Pupils enjoy school and attendance is above average.
- Relationships are a strength in this happy, inclusive school. Pupils are well cared for and get on well with each other.
- Parent links have improved. Parents are positive about the school's work and are more involved in their children's learning. The school works closely with the local community.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed fourteen lessons, of which four were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors made a number of short visits to see small groups of pupils working.
- Meetings were held with senior staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, groups of staff and pupils, and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 29 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection.
- The inspection team observed the school's work, scrutinised the school's current data about pupils' achievement, examined records relating to behaviour and attendance, and looked at documents used by leaders in monitoring and evaluating the school's work.

Inspection team

Sheila Browning, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

David Wolfson

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- High Firs School is a smaller than average sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below that found nationally, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Few pupils are from minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of disabled pupils, and those with special educational needs, is below that found nationally. The proportion of pupils supported through school action and with a statement of special educational needs is below average, although the proportion of pupils supported through school action plus is above average.
- The school currently meets the government's floor standard, which is the minimum expected for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Over recent years, there have been several long-term staff absences and changes in staffing. Three teaching staff are new to the school this term.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve consistency in the quality of teaching and accelerate pupils' learning especially in Key Stage 2 and in mathematics throughout the school by:
 - ensuring all teachers use the high-quality data available to inform planning, so that tasks and lessons are well matched to pupils' abilities, especially for the more able
 - improving the pace of learning so that all pupils are actively engaged and involved in their learning at all times
 - ensuring that pupils are more confident in using number facts and apply this knowledge more frequently to solve everyday mathematical problems
 - ensuring teachers' oral and written feedback tells pupils how to improve.
- Improve pupils' reading, writing and communication skills across the curriculum through a more consistent approach to the teaching of phonics by:
 - ensuring all staff are fully trained and confident in teaching phonics
 - embedding recent initiatives for the teaching of phonics
 - stressing the sounds that letters make to assist younger pupils when spelling and writing.
- Develop the capacity of senior and middle leaders and of the governing body for sustaining school improvement by:
 - developing rigorous professional development to ensure staff at all levels are accountable for the progress of the pupils they teach
 - where teaching requires improvement, teachers have opportunities to observe the good practice in the school and are provided with suitable support to ensure that all their lessons are good or better
 - developing the skills and accountability of all leaders in rigorously monitoring and driving improvement in teaching quality and its impact on pupils' learning and progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Unvalidated data from the most recent National Curriculum tests indicate that standards at the end of Year 6 are much improved and are at least in line with those nationally. This is a good improvement on previous years. A similar picture is seen for the test results at the end of Year 2. Results in mathematics up until this year have been declining.
- School data, work scrutiny and inspection evidence show a more variable picture of pupils' achievement between year groups, with lower than national proportions working below age-appropriate levels. Although the achievement gap between boys and girls is narrowing, pupils' achievement in English remains higher than in mathematics.
- Underachievement for some pupils in some Key Stage 2 classes remains. Phonics screening and school assessments show that achievement in phonics has been weak in Reception to Year 2 in comparison to other areas of pupils' language development.
- Children start school in Reception with skills below those typically seen, especially in communication and language. Staff recognise that low levels of communication and language are a barrier to the youngest children's progress and have recently put in increasingly effective measures to help children to achieve better. A school priority is to ensure that the teaching of phonics is consistently good and some good teaching of phonics was observed in Reception, Years 1 and 2.
- By the end of Reception children work independently and make choices because they are encouraged to learn through play. As a result, they develop good social skills.
- The school has worked in close partnership with the local authority to identify and tackle inconsistencies in the quality of mathematics teaching and in pupils' understanding and knowledge of mathematical concepts. The school's recent results show improvement, but as yet this is not secure in all year groups nor is there a track record of improvement.
- Where the needs of each individual is well matched to lesson content and where teaching is well paced, lively and challenging, pupils' progress has improved, but this is not consistent in all classes.
- Well-targeted support helps the progress of pupils supported by school action plus. The school's progress data for pupils eligible for the pupil premium, those disabled, with special educational needs and pupils with English as an additional language indicate that these pupils make similar progress to their peers, and sometimes good progress from their starting points.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because it is too inconsistent across year groups. There is insufficient good or outstanding teaching, especially in Key Stage 2.
- Pupils' learning has been affected by some previous weak teaching and long-term staffing difficulties. It is still affected by the range in teaching quality, especially in Key Stage 2, which, on occasion, is inadequate.
- In good lessons, teachers plan well for pupils' differing abilities and ensure tasks are well matched, interesting and engage pupils with practical hands-on learning activities. Teachers question pupils' understanding and involve them in self and peer assessment so that they develop evaluative and independent learning skills. In these lessons, pupils enjoy learning and are challenged to achieve well.
- Some teaching, more frequently in Key Stage 2, does not take enough account of the range of pupils' abilities in lesson planning and the same work is set regardless of ability. This sometimes leads to early completion of tasks and boredom for those pupils waiting for others to finish work. However, pupils remain well behaved and are patient when learning slows down because of too much teacher talk or inactive learning. Teachers miss

opportunities to engage pupils more in lively practical tasks and use of talk partners to consolidate learning, especially in mathematics.

- The quality of marking is more informative in English than in mathematics. Some books show clear targets for improvement, but this is inconsistent. While some good-quality work is seen in pupils' English work, in mathematics, work can be repetitive, dull and worksheet bound, and shows a few mathematical misconceptions. Pupils told inspectors that homework was set regularly.
- Leaders have reviewed the deployment and training of teaching assistants so that they better support pupils' needs, confidence and progress. Some good-quality personalised support was observed in class, in one-to-one and small group work. Initiatives for the teaching of phonics are too recent to show sustained impact, although good phonic practices were observed in Reception and in Year 1.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' attitudes to learning are consistently good. On the odd occasions where pupils are off task or inattentive, it is usually related to the teaching not being engaging or challenging enough.
- Pupils say that behaviour is typically good and that High Firs is a safe, friendly place. They feel staff listen to them and that they are well cared for. Pupils' contributions to improving the school have led to improvements in the playground and have influenced new staff appointments. Few well-founded concerns were expressed by parents and none were expressed by staff.
- Pupils are confident that any concerns they may have would be dealt with fairly and quickly. They have a good awareness of bullying which they say is rare and that name calling, although it occurs, is dealt with effectively.
- Pupils know how to stay safe and are given good guidance about e-safety. The school is inclusive. All pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and those from different ethnic groups, get on well together. The school has very few fixed period exclusions. Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their above-average attendance. The very few families with persistent absence are well supported through the school and external agencies.
- Breakfast club is popular and pupils told inspectors about the many extra-curricular clubs enjoyed, including sports, arts, gardening and computing. They especially like events and visits linked to their topics, such as Roman Day, the Victorians and The Olympics.

The leadership and management require improvement

- Leaders have sustained the good behaviour, attendance and care of pupils since the previous inspection. Partnerships with parents and others, including external agencies to support those in challenging circumstances, are well established.
- School monitoring and inspection evidence show that teaching is not yet consistently good or better in all classes. Leadership has been focused on improving the level of challenge for all abilities, including those more able, and establishing effective use of assessment data. School records and discussions with staff indicate regular formal lesson observations, work scrutiny and lesson planning checks. Documentation shows that weaknesses are followed up with support, including coaching and mentoring. During recent years, many staff changes and long-term absence have hindered the speed with which improvements have advanced, especially in reducing teaching variability and pupils' underachievement. During the inspection, leaders observed teaching quality with inspectors and the judgements were closely aligned.
- With nearly half of the teaching staff new to the school this term, leaders are keen to grasp

the opportunity to develop staff and middle leaders. Changes in staffing and plans for devolved leadership provide a firmer basis for accountability. Currently, the headteacher and deputy headteacher undertake most of the monitoring and are aligning this practice to the new Teachers' Standards. As yet, the sharing of best practice, along with rigorous and robust professional development, is not embedded to foster consistently good and better teaching.

- Leaders have worked closely with external consultants and the local authority to improve the Early Years Foundation Stage provision. The leadership is developing and changes to the organisation and environment provide a more cohesive approach to developing children's learning. The use and development of the outside learning area remain a key focus.
 - The curriculum promotes a range of experiences that contribute well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Leaders have targeted aspects of writing and mathematics and this remains an ongoing priority. The positive impact of this is seen in the major improvements in the school results for mathematics and writing compared to 2011 at the end of Years 2 and 6. Nevertheless, opportunities in lessons for pupils to apply numeracy skills in exciting, practical problem solving contexts are too few. Year 1 phonics screening showed very low levels of achievement and the school is focusing on the systematic teaching of phonics, linked to accurate assessment and tracking of pupils' progress, but this is not yet fully effective.
 - The identification of, and provision for, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs have been reviewed. The information is being used more effectively to monitor pupil progress and target appropriate support.
 - Communication with parents is improved; home-learning logs, the re-vamped website, weekly newsletter, parent forum, consultation evenings and an open-door policy ensure their views are listened to and they are more involved in their children's learning. Most Parent View returns and the school's own parent surveys are positive.
 - Self-evaluation identifies the strengths and areas for school development. Action planning is linked to whole-school targets, but responsibilities have not been effectively devolved to others in the past due to ongoing staffing difficulties. Consequently, progress in some areas has slowed down. Leaders demonstrate the capacity to promote school improvement.
 - The school has worked closely with the effective local authority support and has been most receptive to the advice it has provided.
 - All statutory safeguarding requirements are met.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body supports the headteacher and evidence shows governors promote equality and tackle any discrimination.
 - Their increased membership extends their expertise and allows them a more cohesive approach in developing their monitoring role.
 - Although they challenge weaker practice, this is not yet robust. Nevertheless, governors are developing their strategic involvement.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupil's needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupil's needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	118541
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	401760

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Phipps
Headteacher	Colin Turtle
Date of previous school inspection	7–8 December 2009
Telephone number	01322 669721
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