

Balfour Primary School

Balfour Road, Brighton, BN1 6NE

Inspection dates

7–8 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	N/A
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Teaching is almost always good, and occasionally outstanding, because teachers are knowledgeable and give pupils interesting work to do.
- Pupils are very keen to learn and make good progress to reach high standards of attainment, particularly in reading and mathematics.
- Teaching of specialist subjects, including music and French, is often outstanding because teachers are highly enthusiastic about what they are teaching.
- Pupils' attendance is much higher than the average figures for primary schools.
- Behaviour is good; pupils are keen to be at school, show good attitudes to their learning, and help one another to do their work. They feel very safe.
- The headteacher has developed a strong team to lead teaching and the curriculum. The leaders are taking decisive actions which are improving teaching and pupils' achievements considerably.
- The many complications around merging the two schools have been tackled systematically. This has meant a smooth transition to a single ethos with robust systems to keep track of the performance of pupils and common approaches to managing behaviour.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils' progress in writing is not as good as in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils who are more able are not given enough chances to work at their own pace and the work they are given is not always hard enough.
- Teachers occasionally take too long explaining what pupils need to do and this gives pupils too little time to do the tasks set for them.
- There is not enough outstanding teaching, particularly of writing, because teachers do not always help pupils to use their knowledge of linking letters and sounds (phonics) to support their writing.
- Some teachers do not give pupils enough opportunities to respond to the comments about the work they have done.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 44 lessons taught by 36 teachers, including many observations done together with senior leaders from the school. There were also a number of short visits to lessons and to sessions to support disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, with groups of pupils, with subject coordinators, with members of the governing body and with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked closely at the work pupils were doing in lessons, as well as the work they have done over time, in their books, and listened to pupils read. Pupils explained how they know how well they have done and what they need to do next in their learning.
- Pupils spoke to inspectors informally during their free time, and parents and carers also gave their views at the start or end of the day. The 125 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, were also taken into account.
- Inspectors also looked at a range of school documentation, including that on safeguarding procedures.

Inspection team

Andrew Saunders, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Christine Dickens	Additional Inspector
Andrew Lyons	Additional Inspector
Bryan Meyer	Additional Inspector
Clare Gillies	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is much larger than average, with four forms of entry in each year group. It is based on two sites which are adjacent to each other.
- The school opened in September 2011, the result of an amalgamation of the previous infant and junior schools on the site. The headteacher was appointed to oversee the merger in 2011. The leadership structure was enlarged in September 2011 and includes a deputy headteacher and two director-of-learning posts, one of which is shared by two teachers.
- The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium funding is below average; this includes pupils eligible for free school meals, looked-after children and those from service families.
- Most pupils are White British. A wide range of other ethnic heritages are represented.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is below average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational need is also below average.
- The school exceeds the current government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations set for the levels that pupils should attain and the progress they should make.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
 - giving the more-able pupils opportunities to get on with challenging work as soon as they understand what they need to do
 - keeping the teachers' input at the start of lessons short and focused so that pupils get stuck into doing the tasks more quickly
 - making sure that all pupils consolidate their progress by responding to the comments teachers make about their work.
- Make sure that the rate of progress in writing matches that in reading and mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that there is a consistent approach to teaching the linking of sounds and letters and emphasising how this helps writing.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils reach high standards of attainment in national tests at the end of Year 6. From their starting points when they join the school this represents good progress. Progress is not as strong in writing as it is in reading and mathematics.
- Many of the children who join the school in Reception have skills and knowledge which are better than those which might be expected for their age. Some are very advanced, up to a year ahead of their age group. This means that they are ready to learn and are keen to practise the new skills they cover. They make a rapid start to their learning.
- Good progress continues through Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 because pupils are so keen to learn, teachers provide them with engaging work, and the level of challenge is appropriate for most pupils. Work in their books, the school's information about how well pupils are doing, and lesson observations of teaching and learning show that this good progress is typical.
- In most classes, where the school's agreed approach is used, pupils quickly grasp how to link sounds and letters for reading (phonics). This, alongside the support most pupils get from parents and carers, makes them very confident readers, often a year or more ahead of their age by the end of Key Stage 1. However, the use of phonics is not as well developed with older pupils, and is not used as effectively as it could be to support their spelling and writing.
- This is a very inclusive school where disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are encouraged and helped so that they make good progress. They do better than similar pupils elsewhere. Many pupils catch up with the levels expected for their age and the level of support they need is reduced, with some no longer needing any support at all.
- The additional support for pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium funding means that they perform similarly to other pupils in the school and also make good progress.
- The many pupils who reach levels above those expected for their age are given good opportunities to extend their learning through enrichment experiences, such as a visit about science to a local college. These pupils returned to school awestruck, bubbling with ideas and enthusiasm for science, wanting to learn more. However, these activities are not always matched by the level of challenge during day-to-day lessons, and sometimes these more-able pupils are expected to listen to the same explanations as other pupils; the tasks they are given to do are too similar to those the other pupils are doing and are not hard enough.
- Pupils have good opportunities to develop their skills in reading, writing and mathematics across a range of the subjects they study, although their writing is not always at quite the same high level as it is in English lessons. The development of wide-ranging skills with computers is promoted because of the new netbooks available in each classroom. Pupils who are particularly gifted and talented with information and communication technology (ICT) are chosen as 'digital leaders' who help other pupils, and explore and promote new software.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers are enthusiastic and have excellent rapport with the pupils; they make sure that pupils feel that learning is fun. They typically teach with passion and enjoy using video clips and the available technologies to help make lessons interesting and effective.
- Lessons consistently start with a clear explanation of what it is that pupils will be learning to do and keep moving at a good pace. In the best lessons, pupils help to decide the key criteria that will show them whether they have grasped what they should have learnt. However, there are still some lessons where teachers spend too long explaining and pupils spend too little time doing the tasks set for them.
- Pupils of different abilities are given slightly different work to do, involving more complex numbers or more advanced vocabulary. However, the tasks are not always hard enough for the more-able pupils, who are often ready to get on with an independent task to use the skills they

may already have. At times, this constrains their progress.

- There is an agreed approach to the marking of books and this is used throughout the school. In the best lessons, teachers make sure that pupils respond to the comments and highlighted text or examples so that they consolidate their progress. However, in too many lessons, these opportunities are missed and pupils do not benefit from the comments as much as they could.
- Teaching of specialist subjects, including music and French, is a strength of the school, because teachers are very well informed, highly motivated and enthusiastic. Consequently, pupils develop a love of these subjects; many learn to play a wide range of musical instruments, or sing in the choir.
- Teaching assistants who focus on helping disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are well informed and knowledgeable. This is because of the good training they have received, which is closely focused on the specific needs of individual pupils. The effectiveness of their support is checked carefully by senior leaders so that pupils develop their ability to work on their own too.
- The particular programmes chosen to support pupils at school action and school action plus are carefully considered and evaluated to ensure they are effective. The teaching assistants put these into action well, and the impact they have on the progress of the pupils is carefully monitored. This means these pupils make good progress, so that they catch up with their peers and may no longer need the support.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is often outstanding because routines have been carefully considered to promote curiosity and give pupils the best chances to learn. The excellent resources available, along with the good questioning and nurturing support by the adults, mean that children are encouraged to try to find answers for themselves.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' love of learning and their positive views of school are key reasons why attendance is so high. One pupil gave a typical view when he said, 'School is awesome!' Many parents and carers expressed similar views, saying that their children love coming into school.
- During lessons pupils readily do what is required of them and follow instructions well. They are very capable of deciding what they need to do next but do not yet have enough opportunities to do so. At times they are too content with the minimum expected of them and wait for the teacher to give them something more to do.
- During their free time pupils get along with one another very well. While there are not many extra resources for them to use in their activities, they make up their own games and play enthusiastically. A few said that it can be a bit scary when some pupils are running around or kicking a ball. Teaching assistants help to ensure that any issues are quickly picked up and that behaviour remains good.
- Around the school, pupils are very polite and show consideration for the needs of each other, for adults and particularly for disabled pupils. Many visitors have commented on their good manners, and the inspectors agreed that the politeness of the pupils is exemplary. Records of behaviour management show that good behaviour is typical over time.
- The strong emphasis on providing pupils with good opportunities to think and reflect on things that happen in the world around them, such as Remembrance Day, alongside their thoughtful responses, means their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well supported.
- The school's work on becoming a 'Rights Respecting school', focused on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), means pupils are aware of the rights of all children, and their responsibilities in helping to realise this. One of the outcomes is that pupils are highly aware of ethical issues and make choices to reflect this.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, and help leaders and governors to identify any concerns around the school. The school's work on e-safety is exemplary. Pupils are well informed about how to protect themselves when browsing the internet, and what to do if they feel they are victims of cyber-bullying.

- The caring ethos, together with the emphasis on each other's rights, means that bullying is very rare, and is dealt with quickly and effectively if it does happen. Pupils said they feel very confident that any worries they have can be taken straight to an adult, who will listen and help them.

The leadership and management are good

- Since the amalgamation, the headteacher has brought the school together with an impressive sense of purpose. There is a strong, well-developed vision for further improvements, and clear plans to bring this about. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding.
- Wider leadership is good. A new team of senior leaders and managers shares the vision and they are clear about their roles in making it happen. Together with the headteacher they are accurate in their view about teaching and the performance of the pupils because they regularly review lessons together and discuss the key features which would make it good or outstanding. They have an excellent grasp of what the data show about pupils' progress.
- Performance management arrangements have been carefully developed so that teachers know exactly what it is they need to do to improve, and are given considerable support to be able to do so. The way this is followed up and that best practice is shared means that teaching is getting even better. There is a strong link between the performance of teachers over time and the levels of pay, and teachers are clear that they have to demonstrate their improvement to get to the next level.
- Subject leaders make sure that pupils have interesting topics to learn about, and the views of pupils are beginning to inform what new ideas and skills they study. The topics often include ideas from a wide range of sources, including different religions and cultures. This gives the pupils a broad experience of the beliefs and lifestyles of others from around the world.
- There is a strong emphasis on caring for the needs of each pupil. Leaders make good use of the additional funding available to help pupils who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, by providing additional resources, well-focused support from adults, and opportunities to have mentoring on a one-to-one basis. How well this support helps pupils is closely monitored and reviewed regularly.
- Together with the staff, the senior leaders and governors have quickly set up new safeguarding policies and ensured that these are understood by all staff and followed closely. For example, visiting teachers are helped to follow the procedures by the teaching assistants who know the systems well.
- The local authority has supported the school well through the transition to a single school. They have helped the headteacher to get a deep understanding of the work of the school, funding a review of the teaching and learning, as well as funding computer systems. They have worked with the school to monitor lessons and develop the skills of middle leaders in getting an accurate view of what good and outstanding teaching looks like. Together with the school, the local authority made sure that data from the two schools were brought together carefully, so that teachers could keep track of how well pupils were doing.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have been a strong support in the process of bringing together the two communities and different approaches to learning. They have a good grasp of what the data show about the performance of different groups of pupils, because they ask probing questions and follow up any concerns. The systems for managing the performance of staff and the headteacher are very robust, and they keep track of how well teaching is improving. They have high aspirations for the school and a clear, strategic plan to bring about this shared vision. Together with senior leaders, governors make sure that all the requirements for keeping pupils safe are met and that staff are confident about what they can do to ensure this is so, through the training that is provided. Governors make sure that they know exactly how the finances are spent, particularly the pupil premium funding, so that pupils get the best opportunities possible.

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 pupils' 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 pupils' 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	114382
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	400238

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	865
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Brereton
Headteacher	Robin Marlin
Date of previous school inspection	No previous inspection
Telephone number	01273 507722
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