

Robert Arkenstall Primary School

Camping Close, High Street, Ely, CB6 3UA

Inspection dates 14–15 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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. Teachers are highly enthusiastic and dedicated. They plan lessons well and use their good knowledge to make sure that the tasks pupils do are interesting.
- Most pupils make good progress, especially in reading and writing, and they reach above-average standards.
- The support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is good and sometimes outstanding. This means they are helped to play a full part in all aspects of school life and they, too, make good progress.
- Handwriting is a strong feature throughout the school and the work in pupils' books is a pleasure to read because of the excellent presentation.
- Relationships are good and pupils like their teachers. They behave well and feel safe in school.
- Senior leaders and the governors work well together to check how well pupils are doing, and have given teachers good training to improve their teaching. As a result standards are rising.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Progress in mathematics is not quite as strong as in reading and writing.
- In lessons, pupils are not always moved on to new work as soon as they are ready to do so.
- Teachers are only just starting to observe each other's lessons, and are not always clear about what makes teaching outstanding.
- Not enough more-able pupils reach the very highest levels they are capable of, because their work is not always hard enough.
- The way senior leaders check the quality of teaching does not always take enough account of the impact of teaching on pupils' progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 29 lessons taught by 13 teachers. Some of these observations were done together with senior leaders from the school. Inspectors also observed parts of sessions to support disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders and subject leaders, governors and groups of pupils. There was a telephone discussion with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the work pupils were doing in lessons and looked at the work they have done over time, in their books and their learning logs. Pupils read to inspectors and explained how their targets help them to make progress.
- During free time and at the start of the day, pupils spoke informally to inspectors. Parents also gave their views at the start and end of the school day and 82 had responded to the online survey for Ofsted, Parent View; these responses were also considered.
- Inspectors reviewed and evaluated a range of school documentation, including safeguarding procedures.

Inspection team

Andrew Saunders, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sherry Gladwin

Additional Inspector

Margaret Louisy

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized school that has some mixed-age classes in all year groups.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs varies between year groups, and in some it is above average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is above average. The proportion of pupils who are supported at school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium funding is below average. This includes those who have been eligible for free school meals, children looked after by the local authority, and those with a parent who serves in the armed forces.
- Most pupils are White British. There are a very few pupils from a wide range of other ethnic heritages.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching, by:
 - giving teachers more opportunities to share best practice and work together to give pupils consistently outstanding learning experiences
 - keeping the explanations at the start of all lessons short so that pupils have more time to do the tasks set for them.
- Improve progress in mathematics, particularly for more-able pupils, by:
 - giving these pupils more demanding tasks, and encouraging them to get on with their own work as soon as they know what they need to do.
- Making sure all teachers know what outstanding teaching looks like, and what they need to do to reach this level, by:
 - refining the way teaching and learning are checked and followed up, so it is always closely focused on the progress that pupils make and linked to the key areas leaders have identified to improve the whole school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- By the end of Year 6, pupils reach levels of attainment which are above average, particularly in reading and writing. While attainment in mathematics is also above average, it is not as strong. The proportion of pupils reaching and exceeding the expected levels compares favourably with national figures. From their starting points, this represents good progress.
- Pupils join the school in Reception with skills and knowledge which are broadly at the levels expected for their age. The excellent routines, well-trained staff and high-quality resources mean that children quickly develop their enthusiasm for learning and make a good start in developing their skills.
- During lessons, pupils typically make good progress because they are given work that is just hard enough for them, and their positive attitudes mean they are keen to get on with it. Occasionally some of the more-able pupils find the work too easy and finish it quickly, so they do not make as much progress as they are capable of. These pupils are given special opportunities to tackle very demanding problems during theme days or trips, which they greatly enjoy.
- The work in pupils' books shows that many make outstanding progress in reading and writing, but progress in mathematics is not always as good. The school has taken action to improve the quality of teaching in mathematics by looking at how it is taught particularly well in other schools. The focus on making sure all teachers use the same approaches and parents are helped to understanding them, as well as purchasing new resources, is helping to improve progress in mathematics.
- The previous gap in the performance of boys and girls has been tackled and is closing quickly. Teachers still miss some opportunities to ensure that boys are as fully involved in some lessons, to maximise their progress.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are helped and guided by teaching assistants who are very well trained in understanding their particular needs and encouraging them to be as independent as possible. Consequently they make good progress in developing their skills in communicating, reading, writing and mathematics. Helpful resources are provided wherever possible to keep them interested and involved in learning.
- Pupils who are eligible for additional funding through the pupil premium benefit from additional adult support, enrichment activities such as educational visits and 'booster' groups to support their personal development. This helps them to develop their confidence and make good progress so their attainment is above the levels reached nationally by this group.

The quality of teaching is good

- Almost all teaching is at least good, and some is outstanding. Teachers have an excellent rapport with the pupils, expect high levels of work and behaviour, and use their good knowledge of the subjects they are teaching to carefully plan lessons. Teachers are keen to share ideas, but are not always confident about what makes teaching outstanding because they have only recently started to observe each other's lessons.
- Teachers and teaching assistants use probing questions to check how well pupils understand what they have been learning, and increasingly use the results to adapt their explanations and

set appropriate targets for pupils. There is a strong sense of purpose in lessons because adults help pupils to be as independent as possible, and expect them to try things for themselves.

- There are some occasions when teachers' explanations go on for too long. This particularly affects the more-able pupils, who are quite often ready to get on with the work planned for them with only a brief explanation, but do not have enough time to complete it.
- Teachers all follow the same effective approach to the teaching of how to link sounds and letters (phonics). As a result, pupils quickly become confident readers and use these skills well to help them learn. The teaching of handwriting is a passion of the staff, and is exemplary. Consequently pupils' writing in their class books and learning logs is highly impressive. Another strength is the teaching of music, which develops a love of singing for the pupils.
- Marking of books is also of a very high quality across the school. Teachers make sure that pupils are encouraged by recognising what they have achieved, and know what they need to do next. Pupils are now in the habit of responding to this marking, and appreciate that the teachers notice this and follow it up with a further comment. Pupils also help to decide when they have reached their targets.
- Pupils love choosing the work they want to do for their learning logs. These books, where pupils record the work they do at home or in their own time, show that pupils are confident using a wide range of skills including writing, reading, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills.
- The gap between boys and girls, particularly in writing, is being tackled by a range of initiatives including new, exciting experiences to start some of the topics. Teachers also focus on getting pupils to talk about their ideas before writing them down, a strategy that boys say helps them.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour in lessons is typically good, and is outstanding at times because pupils enjoy being at school, like the work the teachers give them to do, and work together cooperatively. They readily do what is asked of them and are keen to get their work right. They are very proud of their handwriting, with good reason.
 - Behaviour is not yet outstanding because pupils do not always maintain this for themselves during free times, when they can become boisterous. Occasionally their games can become too lively. These issues are quickly dealt with by the adults supervising them, but a few pupils do not always think about the consequences of their actions without being reminded.
 - Pupils are very reflective about their work whenever they are given the opportunity, and during an assembly they enthusiastically celebrated the excellent work some pupils had done. This is also evident in their thoughtful responses to the comments in teachers' marking. However, in class pupils do not always have enough opportunities to give each other feedback about their work.
 - Attendance is above average. Many parents said they do not have any problem getting their children to school and that they get plenty of information about how well their children are doing.
 - Pupils show great care for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, or anyone
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who is finding things difficult. They are kind and help with special arrangements to support disabled pupils.

- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, particularly because of their visit to Ely Fire Station, where they thought about a wide range of emergencies and dangerous situations, and what was the best thing to do in these circumstances. They also know what to do to keep themselves safe on the internet, and to stop or prevent cyber-bullying.
- Pupils said that bullying does not usually happen at their school, although they know a lot about it because of the work the school has done. They are aware of different forms of bullying, and feel confident that if any does happen and they tell an adult about it, it will be dealt with quickly.

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders have made sure that teachers share the vision for the school, and have brought about significant improvements in the performance of boys and girls and those supported at school action and school action plus. They keep a close eye on how well pupils are doing, and discuss this with teachers so that all pupils are helped to make the good progress they should.
- Agreed approaches to specific issues, such as teaching phonics or mental mathematics, are carefully explained, put in place and then followed up. This means there is impressive consistency in areas that have been tackled, including the development of handwriting and the marking of books across the school.
- Senior leaders have accurate views about the quality of teaching because they monitor it and discuss their findings regularly. The results inform their decisions about teachers' pay, to ensure that finances provide good value for money. However, their feedback to teachers following lesson observations is not always linked to the issues facing the school or overall development plans. At times, observations focus too much on what is being taught and the techniques used, rather than the impact these have on pupils' progress.
- Leaders have tackled the previous decline in attainment in mathematics successfully by buying new resources and practical equipment for pupils to use to explore mathematical ideas. They have explored the approaches used to teach mathematics elsewhere, and have encouraged teachers to try out these new ideas.
- Teachers are given good opportunities to go on training courses or visit other schools with particularly effective approaches. This means they think carefully about how they teach and look for ways to improve what they do. They are beginning to observe each other teaching but this is at an early stage.
- Pupils study different subjects in interesting 'topics' so that the skills they are learning are quickly used in a range of contexts. The school is beginning to ask the pupils to give ideas about how they can do this even more.
- The local authority has worked well with the school to identify best practice in other schools, particularly in mathematics, and to help pupils who have speech and language difficulties. It tracks the school's performance and provides appropriate training courses.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors have a clear, accurate view of the school’s strengths and weaknesses, including how well it performs against similar schools nationally, because they ask probing questions and have had training to develop their understanding of the available data. They support the senior leaders in making sure that finances are used well, particularly to reward teachers with responsibilities and encourage the best teaching, and that the pupil premium funding has an impact on the achievement of the pupils it is intended for. Together with senior staff, the governors make sure that all the requirements to keep pupils safe are met and that staff are well trained to know what they can do to ensure this is so.
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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 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	110635
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	403126

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	265
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fiona Brampton
Headteacher	Dominic Sharp
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2008
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