

Featherstone Wood Primary School

Featherston Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 9PP

Inspection dates 4–5 December 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that has serious weaknesses.

- Over the last two years, too many pupils have made less progress than they should have done in Years 3 to 6. This has been particularly so in mathematics.
- The school has not recovered fully from the effects of past weaknesses in teaching and some pupils still have big gaps in their learning.
- Although improving, teaching is not yet consistently good throughout the school. This means that pupils are only making faster than expected progress in some classes.
- The work that some classes are set is not always suitable for every pupil's needs. This means that some pupils struggle and others do not tackle hard enough work.
- While most pupils behave well, a few sometimes behave inappropriately in lessons. This slows everyone's learning.
- The many staff changes recently and the number of newly qualified teachers mean that senior leaders have had to take on too much responsibility for leading subjects and driving improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- Children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- By the end of Year 1, pupils have a very good knowledge of the sounds that letters make. Pupils' attainment is broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2.
- Teaching is improving across the school and more pupils now make good progress, particularly in Years 2, 5 and 6.
- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and governing body provide strong leadership and are rigorous in tackling inadequate teaching. Senior leaders' sense of urgency is helping to raise pupils' achievement.
- The school does a great deal to meet the needs of pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable.
- Pupils enjoy school and say that they feel safe there.

Information about this inspection

- Twenty-four lessons were visited and all teachers working on the days of the inspection were observed. Four pupils in Years 1 and 2 read their books to an inspector.
- The inspection team spent a considerable amount of time sampling pupils' exercise books in Years 1 to 6 and looked at children's work and records in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, staff and the Chair of the Governing Body. A telephone discussion took place with a representative of the local authority.
- A group of pupils met with an inspector and there were several informal discussions with pupils about their work.
- Inspectors took account of the seven responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and talked informally with parents during the inspection. Questionnaire responses from 10 members of staff were analysed.
- Documents scrutinised during the inspection included the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, performance data and records of pupils' progress.
- Inspectors looked at records and documents relating to aspects of pupils' behaviour, teachers' planning and the systems used for assessment.

Inspection team

Margaret Goodchild, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Graham Gossage

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Information about this school

- Featherstone Wood is a smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The school serves an area with a high proportion of social housing on the outskirts of Stevenage.
- A fall in the number on the school roll and the availability of places has meant that several pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable have joined Featherstone Wood from other schools part of the way through Key Stage 2.
- A high proportion of pupils are supported through the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, who are looked after by the local authority or whose parents are in the Armed Forces).
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is low but the proportion supported at school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced a high turnover of staff and had difficulty in recruiting permanent teachers. A new teacher for Year 6 is due to start at the beginning of next term. In the meantime, the headteacher is sharing the teaching of the Year 6 class with a long-serving supply teacher. A newly qualified teacher joined the school in September 2012 and two other newly qualified teachers will complete their first year of teaching at the end of this term.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.
- Broadhall Bunnies, a privately run pre-school provision located on the school site, is inspected separately and did not form part of this inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is at least good by:
 - ensuring teachers always match work closely to the learning needs of different groups of pupils
 - making sure that set tasks keep all pupils working hard throughout the lesson
 - sharpening teachers' questioning skills so that lesson introductions in particular make all pupils think deeply, including the more able
 - ensuring teachers always have suitably high expectations for pupils' behaviour and make full use of the school's system for managing inappropriate behaviour
 - making sure all marking makes clear to pupils what they need to do to improve their work
 - providing training for teachers in the specific areas listed above and focusing leaders' checks on the quality of teaching on improvements in these areas.
- Raise achievement, particularly in mathematics in Years 3 to 6, and ensure boys and girls make at least the expected progress in every year group by:
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to solve problems for themselves in mathematics

- developing pupils’ skills in communicating their mathematical thinking
 - ensuring pupils develop a fluent style of joined handwriting that assists them in writing faster and at greater length.
- Develop the role of subject leaders and ensure they make a greater contribution to raising pupils’ achievement and improving the quality of teaching, particularly in English, mathematics and science.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Children join the school with skills that are low in communication, language and literacy, in mathematics and in social development. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and move up to Year 1 with attainment that is close to that found nationally for their age.
- Attainment is also rising at Key Stage 1 and at the upper end of Key Stage 2. In the recent test about the sounds letters make, pupils in Year 1 performed well above the national average. Attainment at the end of Year 2 has improved and been broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics over the last three years.
- Attainment at the end of Year 6 was low in English and mathematics for boys and girls in 2012 because this year group had been particularly affected by staffing difficulties and past weaknesses in teaching. Fewer than half the pupils reached expected levels in both English and mathematics.
- In 2011, pupils' progress between Years 3 and 6 was significantly below expectations for boys and for the year group as a whole in mathematics. In 2012, many groups of pupils made less progress than they should have done in English and particularly in mathematics. Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs made less progress than they should have done.
- School records show that pupils currently in Years 3 to 6 have not made enough progress in some classes in the past and the school is still working to fill gaps in their learning. Some pupils in Years 3 to 6 struggle to write down their ideas quickly because their handwriting is not fluent enough. In mathematics, they lack the necessary skills to solve problems for themselves and find it difficult to explain their thinking.
- Senior leaders are tackling this situation as a matter of urgency and their actions are leading to clear improvement. Rapid improvements in teaching mean that most pupils now make at least the expected amount of progress but pupils are not learning at a fast enough rate in all classes.
- The school uses its pupil premium funding effectively. As a number of children join the Early Years Foundation Stage with speech, language and communication difficulties, the school pays for specialist support which is helping them to make good progress. In the rest of the school, extra funding is used for pupils most in need of help and provides one-to-one or small-group teaching that is helping them to catch up.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although pupils' achievement over time has been inadequate, senior leaders have been rigorous in tackling ineffective teaching. This has led to a high staff turnover and nearly all the class teachers currently in the school have joined since the previous inspection. This change of staff means that although some teaching still requires improvement, it is no longer inadequate.
- Where teaching requires improvement, teachers do not always give pupils tasks to keep them all working hard throughout the lesson. Sometimes in mathematics, pupils have to wait their turn with nothing to do while others use equipment, and staff do not make sure they get started with their work quickly or notice when some pupils finish early.

- At times, teachers do not match work closely to pupils' different needs or ask questions that push all pupils to think deeply. This means that when the whole class is working together, for instance during lesson introductions, questions are sometimes too easy for more-able pupils. When pupils are working at their tables, the tasks teachers give them are sometimes too difficult for less-able pupils, who struggle to get much written down. At other times tasks are not hard enough to stretch those who are more able.
- When teachers mark pupils' work, they often provide them with good advice about how they could make a piece of work better but not all marking informs pupils about how to improve.
- Nevertheless, there is an increasing amount of teaching that is good across the school and some that is outstanding. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, teachers closely observe children's learning and use this information to plan a careful balance of activities that enable them to make good progress in all areas of learning.
- Throughout the school, skilled teaching about the sounds that letters make ensures that pupils make rapid progress in reading. Good teaching is enabling pupils in Year 2 to make fast progress in reading, writing and mathematics and leading to rapid gains in pupils' achievement in Years 5 and 6.
- Improvements in teaching give pupils a firmer grasp of the skills needed to succeed in the future. Increased one-to-one and small-group support by teaching assistants mean that more pupils who find learning difficult are achieving greater success by the time they leave the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Although most pupils cooperate well with their teachers and have good attitudes to learning, learning in Key Stage 2 is at times disrupted through low-level misbehaviour. In many lessons, teachers manage behaviour well but, when inappropriate behaviour occurs, they do not all apply the school's behaviour policy quickly enough.
- Parents who expressed their views commented favourably on behaviour and the way any bullying incidents are dealt with. Pupils firmly believe that behaviour is improving and they are able to talk about different types of bullying. School records confirm that behaviour is improving and that pupils who find it difficult to settle into school life make good progress in developing and managing their behaviour.
- Pupils understand the importance of letting an adult know if they are worried and say that they feel safe in school. Nearly all parents agree that the school keeps their children safe. Pupils say that 'there is always something to look forward to at school' and that it is 'a good place to be'. More pupils now come to school regularly and attendance is now close to the national average.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The many changes of staff and the fact that nearly half the class teachers are newly qualified mean that senior leaders are not able to share leadership responsibilities as much as they should, except in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Some teachers are beginning to take on leadership roles but even in English, mathematics and science, senior leaders are not yet supported well enough by other staff.

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher communicate high expectations and provide clear direction to the school's work. Both are very good role models for others through the quality of their teaching and they have put effective systems in place to support newly qualified teachers. Staff have many opportunities to develop their skills through training, and leaders make sure any increase in teachers' pay is linked closely to their performance and its effect on pupils' progress.
- Senior leaders have done a lot of teaching in recent months to increase pupils' chance of making up for lost time in their learning. This has contributed to some pupils in Key Stage 2 making rapid progress and standards are rising through the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. The appointment of a new teacher for Year 6 from the beginning of next term has been planned to give senior leaders more time to concentrate on making sure all teaching is at least good and further strengthen the school's capacity to improve.
- The school works very closely with a range of outside agencies to meet the needs of pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable and it is rigorous in tackling discrimination. Much work is done to promote good relationships between different groups of pupils. Parents are increasingly involved in the life of the school. Leaders check pupils' progress each half term and provide extra help for those who need it in an effort to give less-able pupils an equal opportunity to succeed.
- The school offers pupils a wide range of stimulating learning experiences that promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well and provide interesting things to write about.
- The local authority has provided effective support to the school in improving the quality of teaching and aspects of leadership, and in its efforts to raise achievement in English and mathematics.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body works very closely with senior leaders in driving school improvement. Governors' knowledge of data means that they are realistic about pupils' achievement and the school's effectiveness, and concerned to make sure it improves as rapidly as possible. The Chair of the Governing Body talks knowledgeably about the quality of teaching and governors are suitably informed about the management of teachers' performance.
 - The governing body keeps a tight hold on the school's finances and ensures that pupil premium funding is spent appropriately.
 - Although a few governors are new to their roles, a thorough training process has ensured that all members of the governing body develop the necessary skills to hold leaders to account and to support the school's development.
 - Governors ensure that the school fully meets requirements for safeguarding pupils.

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	131505
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	402473

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	193
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lyn McLeod
Headteacher	Carol Pratt
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2010
Telephone number	01438 235550
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