

Firs Primary School

Firs Road, Sale, Cheshire, M33 5EL

Inspection dates 9–10 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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.

- Pupils start school in the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are below those expected for their age. They quickly begin to make good progress so that by the time they leave Year 6, they have caught up and their attainment is average and on a par with others across the country.
- Pupils with special educational needs, including those in the specialist unit, make good progress, due to the high quality support they receive.
- Teaching is consistently good and sometimes outstanding across the school, which is why pupils are making good progress. Extra support is provided for pupils who fall behind to make sure they catch up.
- Pupils are polite, well behaved and want to do well at school. They feel safe and understand how to keep themselves safe.
- The headteacher has made a big difference since her appointment. She has set a clear direction for the school, made sure that teaching has improved and has given all leaders the opportunity to check regularly that pupils are making good progress.
- Governors also provide good levels of support and challenge. They visit the school to make sure pupils are happy, well cared for and achieving well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of pupils' writing is not always as good as their reading and mathematics.
- Pupils are not always given the opportunity to act upon the guidance and advice they receive from teachers in their books.
- The attendance of some pupils is not high enough.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all classes. They visited 22 lessons and sessions with small groups and individuals around the school.
- Discussions were held with pupils, the headteacher and other leaders, members of the governing body, the Education Welfare Officer and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 28 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and previous survey information collected by the school. They also spoke to parents as they brought their children to school.
- Questionnaires from 19 staff were received and their views taken into account.
- The inspection team listened to pupils read, spoke with them about their learning and looked at the work in their books.
- The inspectors looked at a number of documents, including the school’s self-evaluation, improvement plan, data on pupils’ current progress, leaders’ reports of lesson observations, minutes of the governing body meetings and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Heather Simpson, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Christopher Maloney	Additional Inspector
Maureen Coleman	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Firs Primary is similar in size to most other primary schools.
- Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- An above average proportion of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for looked-after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those from service families.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The number of pupils joining or leaving the school at other than the normal starting and leaving times is higher than other schools nationally.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school has specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs.
- A breakfast club is provided by the school and was visited during the inspection. An after-school club is also available but managed by a private provider and as such, is inspected separately.
- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed and the school has achieved a Primary Quality Mark and a Leading Parent Partnership award.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' writing across the school so that they reach levels that are at least in line with the national average by:
 - developing creative opportunities to improve writing, including oral story telling techniques
 - gradually building up the length and accuracy of writing in Key Stage 1
 - improving pupils' use of basic skills of spelling, handwriting and punctuation.
- Improve the consistency of marking by:
 - making sure that all teachers focus on the correction of basic skills in pupils' writing
 - ensuring all teachers identify the next steps for development in pupils' work and provide opportunities for them to act upon the comments made in order to improve their work.
- Raise attendance levels so that the overall figures are in line with other schools nationally by continuing to work with the Education Welfare Officer to ensure parents who still do not bring their children to school regularly, do so.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Most children start school with skills that are below those typically expected for their age, especially in communication and language. Number skills are stronger. Although the majority of children join the school in the Nursery class, an additional third join the Reception classes without any nursery or pre-school experience. Children make good progress in both the Nursery and Reception classes and as a result of successful teaching, start Year 1 with broadly average skills for their age.
- By the end of Year 2, pupils reach standards that are in line with national average. All groups make good progress, especially the more able pupils in reading and the percentage reaching the higher levels has increased since the last inspection. Pupils make better progress in reading than writing in Years 1 and 2. This is as a result of the good teaching pupils receive and the focus that the school has placed upon reading. However, the teaching of writing has not had as high a profile and, therefore, standards are lower.
- Pupils in Key Stage 2 make good progress overall and attainment by the end of Year 6 is average in both English and mathematics. However, attainment is affected by pupils joining the school part way through the year.
- In 2011/2012, an additional 31 pupils joined Key Stage 2, 40% of whom were in Years 5 and 6. Data for current year groups show that attainment at the end of Year 6 is set to be above average in reading and mathematics, but average or slightly below in writing.
- Pupils' writing is not quite as good as their reading or mathematics because their basic skills, including spelling, punctuation and handwriting, are not good enough and not enough links are made between writing and oral story telling. Additionally, teachers in Key Stage 1 expect pupils to write at length too early, and do not always give pupils enough time to build up their writing skills gradually.
- Pupils in the specialist unit and other pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs make good, and on occasion, outstanding progress because of the high-quality support they receive. Extra help is provided both in and out of lessons and pupils are fully included in the life of the school.
- Pupils eligible for the pupil premium also make good progress along with their peers. The funding received by the school is put to excellent use; it provides additional time with adults in lessons, one-to-one reading support, help for pupils with social and emotional difficulties, and subsidises attendance at the breakfast club.
- Reading is promoted well and enjoyed throughout the school. It is particularly well taught and as a result, attainment at the end of Year 2 is consistently high. Younger pupils use their knowledge of letters and sounds successfully to tackle new words. Older pupils read for pleasure at home and also use new technology to develop their reading further.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching has improved since the last inspection as a result of support and training for staff. It is now consistently good in all classes, including the specialist unit, with examples of outstanding teaching, which is why pupils are making good progress.
- In the best lessons observed by inspectors, teaching was lively and pupils were totally absorbed in the activities. An outstanding Year 6 mathematics lesson was full of number challenges and pupils worked exceptionally well together. In the specialist unit, pupils used drama to help them write imaginatively about a Haunted House. Work is consistently well matched to pupils' abilities.
- Teachers also consistently use effective questioning to check pupils' understanding and develop their thinking. They have good subject knowledge and make sure that pupils develop independent skills, right from when they join the Nursery or Reception classes.
- Relationships in all classrooms are strong and the way in which teachers organise their

classrooms ensures that pupils are motivated and participate well in lessons. Teachers set high expectations for the way in which pupils present their work and how they behave. They plan lessons well to ensure they meet the needs of all individuals.

- Teaching assistants are used well to help pupils make good progress, especially those who are disabled or who have special educational needs. They play an active role in lessons by asking questions, checking levels of understanding and helping to improve pupils' work. Additional small group support is also used effectively, for example, to teach reading skills to those who are falling behind.
- Teachers mark pupils' books regularly. Most, but not all, add helpful comments that tell pupils how they can further improve their work. However, time is not always set aside to allow pupils the chance to practise the skills identified nor is enough attention given to improving pupils' basic skills in writing.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils enjoy school and have very positive attitudes to learning. They are polite, respectful and sociable. They behave well in lessons and around school.
- Parents spoken with and those who responded to the questionnaire, Parent View, think that behaviour at the school is good and that pupils are kept safe. Pupils and staff agree.
- The school's behaviour policy is effective and well known by pupils. Outside in the playground, they play well with one another and enjoy using the play equipment. Rewards, such as 'Star of the Week' and 'Headteacher Award' stickers, are also used to reinforce good behaviour and good work.
- Pupils say that bullying is rare, but that if it occurs, teachers sort it out immediately. The only bullying that pupils could think of is occasional name calling when friends fall out.
- Pupils get on well together. Those who join the school at other than the usual starting times are quickly integrated and made to feel welcome. There have been no racial issues in the school.
- Pupils say they feel safe and give examples of how to keep themselves safe. They know who they can talk to if they are upset about anything, and are confident that when incidents are reported, they are dealt with effectively.
- Attendance is below average because a small number of parents still do not bring their children to school regularly. However, the school's pastoral manager is working closely with the Education Welfare Officer to address this and many positive strategies are in place, which are already starting to have an effect on improving attendance. Attendance in the autumn term was above average and the highest it has ever been.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has brought stability to the school since her appointment. Together with her leadership team, she has set a clear direction for the school. Leaders are aware of the strengths and areas for improvement and are honest and accurate in their evaluations. Leadership of the specialist unit is highly effective and as a result, pupils make good, and on occasion, outstanding progress.
- Teachers' performance is regularly checked by all leaders. Training is provided where necessary to improve the quality of teaching. As a result, teaching has improved since the last inspection.
- Staff morale is high and their views are positive. On one questionnaire returned, a staff member wrote 'In the past, I could not have ticked the boxes for "strongly agree", but now I can with confidence'.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through the broad range of experiences provided by the curriculum. A variety of school clubs, visits and visitors enables pupils to broaden their skills and knowledge. Topics are used effectively to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, especially writing. Cultural opportunities include learning to

play an instrument, visiting the Lowry gallery, learning to speak Spanish and finding out about other world faiths and different countries. Spiritual, social and moral development is promoted regularly in lessons and assemblies and pupils are encouraged to work together and have time to reflect quietly.

- Pupils' individual needs are fully met to ensure that they make good progress. This is testimony to the school's focused attention to ensuring all pupils have an equal chance of succeeding and there is no discrimination of any kind. This is particularly successful in the specialist unit.
- The school works well with parents. Workshops are provided to help parents support their children's learning. Effective partnerships have also been established to provide additional support for individual pupils with learning difficulties. This contributes to their good progress.
- The local authority has provided good support in recent years, which has helped raise the quality of teaching. As time has gone on and the school has improved, the headteacher and senior staff have shown that they can make further improvements with less outside support.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors are committed to supporting the headteacher in continuing to improve the school. They are well informed, knowledgeable and have a good overview of the strengths and areas which need developing further. They undertake training to help them fulfil their statutory duties and keep their knowledge up to date, for example, relating to safeguarding. As a result, safeguarding procedures are effective. Governors visit school so that they know how pupils are doing and what happens in the classrooms. They keep a close check on how the school budget is spent. For example, they make sure that the pupil premium funding supports pupils who need extra help, and that the headteacher rewards only those teachers who can show that their pupils are making good progress. The governing body asks challenging questions to hold leaders to account, for example, checking why attendance figures are low.

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	106303
Local authority	Trafford
Inspection number	400839

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	272
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Leigh
Headteacher	Nerys Hitchcock
Date of previous school inspection	8 July 2010
Telephone number	0161 973 7350
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