

Maple Tree Lower School

Hawk Drive, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2WA

Inspection dates 31 January–1 February 2013

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

- There is not enough good teaching to make sure that pupils make good progress in writing and mathematics.
- Teachers do not always make it clear what they expect pupils to learn by the end of the lesson.
- Some of the work is not hard enough for the more-able pupils.
- Pupils' work is not marked well enough, especially in mathematics.
- Leaders do not check rigorously enough how well teachers are teaching and point out what they can do better.
- Improvement targets are not sufficiently precise.

The school has the following strengths

- Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Pupils make good progress in their reading and standards in writing by the end of Year 2 are rising steadily.
- There is some good teaching in all key stages on which the school can build.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and they have a good understanding of personal safety.
- Senior leaders have accurately identified the school's strengths and weaknesses and are taking steps to make things better.
- The governing body has improved significantly and now undertakes its role well.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 19 lessons, of which three were joint observations with the headteacher. In addition, the inspectors made a number of other shorter visits to lessons. They heard some pupils read in Years 2 and 4.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff, groups of pupils and the local authority representative.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including the data the school has collected on pupils’ attainment and progress, procedures for keeping pupils safe and the school development plan.
- Inspectors took account of the 40 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in making their judgements and 20 questionnaires returned by members of staff.

Inspection team

David Wynford-Jones, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Susan Tabberer	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is broadly similar in size to the average primary school.
- The large majority of the pupils are of White British heritage. The remaining pupils come from a number of different minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Very few pupils speak English as an additional language, and no pupil is currently at the early stages of learning English.
- The proportions of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are below average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning or social difficulties.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, who are looked after by the local authority or whose families are in the armed forces) is well below average.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision off site.
- The school runs a breakfast club, an after-school club and a holiday play scheme.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring that teachers make better use of assessment information to plan work that is just right for pupils working at different levels
 - ensuring that pupils of different abilities know exactly what they are expected to achieve in every lesson
 - making certain that time is not wasted in lessons.
- Raise standards and quicken pupils' progress in writing and mathematics, especially in Years 3 and 4 by:
 - ensuring that pupils make their writing more interesting by including adjectives, alliteration, similes and metaphors
 - developing the pupils' skills in undertaking practical mathematical activities and in problem solving
 - making certain that teachers consistently mark pupils work well and give them clear pointers to improve their work.
- Improve the leadership of the school by:
 - developing the skills of all leaders in checking the quality of teaching and how well pupils learn
 - refining the school development plan to include precise measurable outcomes, linked to pupils' attainment and progress, by which the impact of the actions can be checked.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Children join the reception class with skills and knowledge similar to those expected for their age. Most attend the school's part-time nursery where they get on well together and enjoy school. They make good progress in the well organised Early Years Foundation Stage and by the end of the Reception class standards are marginally above average in all areas of learning.
- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 4 have declined slightly over the last three years. They are now rising and are above the expected levels in reading and broadly in line in writing and mathematics. Even so, based on their attainment at the end of Year 2, the majority of pupils currently in Years 3 and 4 are not making the progress they should to reach high standards in writing and mathematics.
- Pupils are beginning to make quicker progress in their writing as a result of the school's emphasis on improving their writing skills. This has resulted in rising standards by the end of Year 2. While most pupils in Years 3 and 4 are working at the level expected for the age, few attain higher levels by consistently bringing richness to their writing with the use of adjectives, alliteration, similes and metaphors. They do not routinely use dictionaries or a thesaurus to check their spelling or find alternative words.
- Progress in mathematics requires improvement. Throughout the school pupils have a reasonable understanding of number and mathematical terminology. However, their skills in undertaking practical mathematical investigations and in solving problems are not as secure. This is because the activities do not always give the pupils the scope to find things out for themselves. Sometimes the tasks are too easy.
- Pupils of all ages read well and are making good progress. Younger pupils have a good understanding of phonics (the sounds that letters make) as shown when tackling new words. Their reading skills by the end of Year 2 and Year 4 are above average. Older pupils understand the school's reading scheme colour-coding system and strive to become 'free readers'. They can name their favourite author. Most are able to explain why they like that author's style of writing and why they prefer one author to another.
- The progress of the very few pupils supported by the pupil premium is now more rapid. Checks are made to see how well they are doing and additional support is provided if necessary. Year 2 assessment information shows that the standards attained by pupils in this group were above the national average for pupils eligible for free school meals and that the gap between them and other pupils is closing. There is no national information to compare the outcomes at the end of Year 4.
- The progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is similar to their peers, as is that of pupils who speak English as an additional language. They are well supported by teaching assistants who make sure they are included, understand the tasks and have equal access to the same learning opportunities as other pupils.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because pupils do not make good enough progress over time. Teachers do not consistently make best use of assessment information to plan lessons and do not make it clear what they expect pupils of different abilities to learn. As a result, some pupils,

particularly the more-able, do not do as well as they could.

- The majority of teachers do not ask sufficiently probing questions to check pupils' understanding or to extend their learning. Some lessons do not proceed at a quick enough pace and time is wasted. In these lessons pupils spend too long sitting on the carpet listening to the class teacher and are not given enough opportunity to take an active part in their learning.
- The marking of pupils' work has improved. They are offered good guidance to improve their written work, but are not consistently told what they need to do to reach their targets in mathematics. Across subjects, there are very few examples of the teachers revisiting earlier marking to satisfy themselves that pupils have responded to the advice.
- There is some good teaching on which the school can build. Where teaching is good, the content of lessons captures the interests of pupils. The lessons are well planned and proceed at a quick pace. The work is pitched at the right level across the range of ability represented in the class. Consequently, the pupils respond enthusiastically to the challenges they are set.
- In better lessons, teachers make effective use of small group work and encourage pupils to share their ideas with each other and with the adults. Electronic whiteboards are used well to stimulate learning and bring an added dimension to the lesson. Pupils are given the opportunity to reflect on their work and to think about how it could be improved.
- Teachers are helping pupils to develop their reading skills through the systematic teaching of phonics and encouraging them to read in school and at home.
- All teachers have a good relationship with their pupils and use a number of ways to encourage good behaviour. The teachers' interaction with the pupils promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils are courteous and polite to visitors and show respect and tolerance for each other. They behave well in lessons and around the school. They respond quickly to instructions from their teachers and understand the school's behaviour policy, which is applied consistently.
- Pupils are eager to offer their help whenever possible. They are eager to learn and willingly take on responsibilities around the school, for example, as members of the school council, the eco-council and as playground buddies.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They feel secure in school and are confident that first aid will be administered quickly if they are injured.
- Pupils know about different types of bullying, including physical abuse, name-calling and cyber-bullying. They say that should a rare incident occur it will be dealt with quickly and fairly by the staff. There have been no reported incidents of racist behaviour.
- Pupils' attendance continues to improve and is above average.
- Pupils enjoy going to the breakfast club and after-school club where they play a different games and are given a healthy snack. The clubs help the pupils develop their social skills and foster a positive attitude to school.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Senior and middle leaders have not made sure that all lessons are taught well. Teachers have not been given clear and consistent advice on what they need to do to make certain that all pupils make good progress.
- The senior leadership team has made some improvements since the last inspection. There is a clear plan for school development based on a secure evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses. Action is now being taken to improve teaching through whole-school training and links with other schools and the local authority. The school has rightly and successfully concentrated on improving standards in English and mathematics.
- The curriculum is suitably structured to ensure all National Curriculum subjects are covered. Staff work together well to plan topics or themes that combine subjects and make them relevant for the pupils. Good use is made of the topics to reinforce writing skills. Opportunities to promote the pupils' mathematical skills are sometimes missed. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well.
- Teachers are now held to account for pupils' performance. Regular checks on pupils' attainment and progress are recorded and analysed by the headteacher. Teachers are asked to explain if any pupil is not doing as well as he/she should and what they are going to do about it. The headteacher uses this performance information to advise the governing body whether individual teachers should be paid more.
- The local authority has provided reasonable support to the school over the last few years. Advice has been given on raising attainment in writing, and developing the roles of subject coordinators and governors.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governance of the school has improved significantly, although governors have not yet not made sure that action plans have precise measurable outcomes, linked closely to pupils' attainment and progress. Members of the governing body now have a good understand of their roles and responsibilities, in part an outcome of training sessions they have attended. They are clear about the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are able to compare the school's outcomes with national and local data and ask challenging questions of the leadership team. The governing body makes sure the school meets requirements for safeguarding pupils and that all policies are updated in line with changes in statutory requirements. Following the recent review of the school's Appraisal Policy, governors have a reasonable understanding of how targets are set for teachers and good teaching is rewarded. The headteacher's reports give governors a reasonable overview of the quality of teaching. The school's finances are monitored well. The governing body makes sure that pupil premium funding is being spent appropriately on additional support staff for one-to-one teaching and, for example, to support educational visits. Governors check for any possible issue of discrimination and have good procedures in place to follow up any suspected incident, should one arise.

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	132236
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	406488

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Shaw
Headteacher	Pauline Duncombe
Date of previous school inspection	3 February 2011
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