

Yewtree Primary School

Fletcher Way, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP2 5QR

Inspection dates 6–7 March 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		Requires improvement	3
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

- Pupils do not make sufficient progress across the school in order to reach standards expected of them by the end of Year 6. Boys do not make as much progress as girls, particularly in reading and writing.
- Teachers do not always pitch their lessons to challenge all pupils or use their questions to extend their thinking and check their understanding.
- Pupils eligible for support through additional funding are not making enough progress to close gaps between their attainment and national averages by the end of Year 6.
- The governing body does not challenge the headteacher sufficiently across all areas of the school's work.
- Improvement planning is not based on a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher is securing tangible improvements in the school by making sure that everyone is pulling together to improve teaching.
- School leaders and governors have worked hard to ensure that pupils are kept safe in school.
- Most pupils try hard and behave well around the school.
- Learning is being made more interesting by linking learning between subjects through topics.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 21 lessons or parts of lessons, of which four were joint observations with senior staff.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils, school staff, members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 11 responses to the on-line parent questionnaire (Parent View) and held informal discussions with parents and carers at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own information on the pupils' current progress, planning and monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Martin Beale, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jennifer Barker

Additional Inspector

Carol Worthington

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is average in size.
- An above average proportion of the pupils are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is also above average.
- The majority of pupils are known to be eligible for funding through the pupil premium. This is extra money given to schools for looked after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children of service families.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is above average. The proportion of pupils supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above average. Their needs are varied but a significant number have been identified with behavioural and emotional difficulties.
- More pupils than in other primary schools join or leave part way through their primary school education.
- The school has been through a period of considerable staff turnover since its last inspection and the headteacher and deputy headteacher were appointed in September 2012. Furthermore, the governing body has had difficulty in recruiting new governors.
- The school does not use alternative provision for its pupils.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that all pupils make at least good progress by:
 - ensuring that teachers plan and deliver lessons that meet the needs of all pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs
 - developing the questioning skills of teachers and support staff.
- Increase the children's progress in the Nursery and Reception by training all staff so that they have the necessary skills to be able to intervene more effectively to improve children's progress.
- Strengthen leadership and management so that the school has greater capacity for improvement by:
 - sharpening self-evaluation so that it provides an accurate analysis of the performance of all groups of pupils
 - basing improvement planning on challenging targets to increase the pupils' progress.
- Review the work of the governing body so that governors are able to hold the school to account for its performance, including how well it uses pupil premium funding.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Attainment is well below average by the end of Year 6, lower in mathematics than in English. It is lowest for boys, particularly in reading and writing, and for pupils eligible for support through pupil premium funding.
- The children's skills on entry to the Nursery are low for their age. Their progress is not rapid enough in the Nursery and Reception classes and attainment is well below average by the time they enter Year 1.
- Nevertheless, from their low starting points, most pupils made the expected progress between Years 2 and 6 in English, while slightly fewer did so in mathematics. There has been a slow but steady upward trend in pupils' progress since the last inspection. This improvement is starting to accelerate but it is too early to see if this will lead to a sustained rise in attainment. Later arrivals make similar progress to others.
- The emphasis being placed on developing the pupils' basic skills is leading to rising attainment in English. Pupils are making better progress in understanding phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) and applying this when faced with unfamiliar words. Texts that interest boys more are giving them more enjoyment in reading and are a stimulus to get them writing more. Pupils have plenty of opportunity for writing in a variety of styles within topics but in general there is not enough time spent on undertaking extended pieces of writing.
- Similarly, a focus on basic skills in mathematics is supporting more rapid progress. The focus on calculating skills is leading to greater accuracy from pupils and they are learning to apply their skills when solving mathematical problems.
- The gap between the attainment of pupils supported through pupil premium funding and others in their classes is evident on entry and does not close sufficiently by Year 6. Test results for these pupils put them over 18 months behind national averages in 2012.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make similar progress to others, although this varies across the school. This is because their progress is often rapid when working on specific programmes outside the classroom, but their needs are not as sharply met in lessons.
- The most successful group of pupils are those who speak English as an additional language. Their progress is good and their attainment broadly average and generally higher than others in each class. This is partly because they respond well to the emphasis placed by teachers on their language development and are more committed to learning, as shown by their better attendance and fewer incidents of misbehaviour.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Over time, and in no small part due to significant staffing changes in the school, teaching has not been of the quality needed for the pupils to reach national average standards by the end of Year 6. In lessons where teaching is in need of improvement, progress is not rapid enough.
- Where teaching requires improvement, activities are not closely matched to the next steps in pupils' learning and teachers' questioning does not challenge thinking or check understanding.

Improvements are being seen in mathematics through training for teachers, but at times their insecure expertise slows the progress of pupils.

- Teachers' planning and their deployment of support staff do not always ensure that the needs of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are fully met.
- At times, adults in the Nursery and Reception classes miss the opportunity to engage with the children and develop their language skills or give them the chance to discuss and share ideas about their activities. Nevertheless, children learn to take turns and have plenty of opportunity to work together as well as on their own. Classrooms provide opportunities for children to progress in all areas of learning and they can also take part in activities such as role-play or growing plants in the garden.
- Teaching is now improving and an increasing number of lessons are well taught. When at its best, particularly in English, teachers make pupils think and resources such as video clips stimulate their imaginations. Teachers engage pupils through their questioning and provide many opportunities for them to learn from each other, either in discussion or by working together on activities. Expectations of work and behaviour are sufficiently high for classrooms to be calm as pupils respond to their teachers' challenges.
- Marking is very thorough and not only helps pupils to see what they have done well but also gives guidance on how work can be improved. However, these suggestions are not always responded to by the pupil to or followed up by the teacher. Furthermore the next steps suggested are not always closely linked to the pupils' targets and how they can be achieved.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- Over time, behaviour has required improvement. This is because a small minority of pupils are not always able to conform to the school's expectations. Furthermore, a few pupils can lose concentration at times when they do not find teaching interesting, so disrupting their own learning and that of those around them. This, coupled with the school's determination to improve behaviour, explains why fixed-term exclusions have been above average in recent years.
- Behaviour is now improving and records show fewer pupils are causing concern. This is confirmed through discussions with pupils across the school. Pupils move around the school sensibly and are respectful towards adults. They happily help newcomers settle in and adjust to school life. The vast majority try their best in lessons and work well collaboratively on activities.
- The school supports pupils with behavioural and emotional difficulties well. Individual strategies to help them modify their behaviour are carried out meticulously by staff so pupils know what will happen if they fail to meet targets set. The 'Nurture Group' is a secure environment that helps younger pupils to gain confidence so they can return to their normal classes as quickly as possible.
- Attendance had fallen to a low level last year but is now improving quickly, although it is still below average. Good attendance is celebrated and rewarded while at the same time the school uses all sanctions available if absence is a concern. In spite of this, some persistent absence remains. However, by identifying and working with individual families the school is reducing the number of pupils concerned.
- Pupils say they feel safe and that although there have been some incidents of bullying these

have been dealt with quickly by staff. Regular talks from the police, including on internet safety, help pupils identify and deal with any risks they might face in their lives. Staff are doing their utmost to tackle discrimination but this has not always been successful in stamping out some racist name-calling.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- While there is tangible evidence of improvement, systems are not yet in place to secure sustained progress. Self-evaluation does not always get to the heart of the school and particularly the performance of different groups. Furthermore, improvement planning is not focused sharply enough on targets for improving pupils' progress.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The core group of governors is clear about where the school needs to improve, particularly in its teaching and the steps being taken by the headteacher. Governors have ensured that only good teaching will be rewarded by increases in salary. Governors undertake training, but this has not led to them having a secure understanding of assessment data. This limits their ability to compare the school's performance with others and to provide the expertise to question and challenge the headteacher. Governors understand most financial matters but they are unclear how pupil premium funding is allocated and its impact on the pupils for whom it is intended.
- The targets the headteacher has set each teacher challenge them to ensure that pupils make at least good progress in their classes. She has put in place a wide range of procedures to check the performance of teachers, which give a clear picture of where each teacher needs to improve. Based on this, personalised guidance and training are provided which are leading to improvements in teaching across all parts of the school.
- Recent local authority support has proved pivotal in helping the headteacher to identify priorities for improving the school and planning the action to be taken. Literacy and numeracy consultants have also worked with individual staff to improve teaching and learning in their classes.
- Although not fully successful, as shown by some gaps in the achievement of different groups of pupils, promoting equality of opportunity is a key priority for school leaders. Individual tuition for pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is starting to make a difference to their key skills. The school is also strengthening its work with families by seeking support from outside agencies and working closely to improve their children's attendance and behaviour.
- Teachers are striving to make the pupils' experiences more interesting and to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Topic themes supported by visits such as to St Albans Cathedral, link learning between subjects well. Pupils now have a greater awareness of cultural diversity than previously, including through links abroad with a school in Ghana.

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	135222
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	402679

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	256
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rob Little
Headteacher	Faye Ewen
Date of previous school inspection	25 May 2010
Telephone number	01442 424920
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