

Walkern Primary School

High Street, Walkern, Stevenage, SG2 7NS

Inspection dates 9–10 May 2013

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.

- Leaders have focused strongly on improving the quality of teaching and the work planned for the pupils.
- Teaching is consistently good or better in all classes and pupils are making improved progress.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because the staff know their needs well and give good support.
- Attendance rates have improved significantly in the last three years and are now above the national average.
- Pupils' behaviour is good, both in lessons and around school. Pupils and their parents agree that this is the case and say that the children feel safe and cared for well.
- The headteacher has been in post for less than two years but has made an outstanding contribution to the creation of a strong team of staff, governors, parents and pupils.
- The new Chair of Governors and the experienced Vice-Chair have strengthened governance so that governors now hold the school to account more effectively for pupils' attainment and progress.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The results in writing of the more able pupils are below average for this group.
- Although improving, not enough teaching is consistently outstanding; teachers do not encourage pupils to present their work neatly enough or always punctuate it accurately.

Information about this inspection

- Ten lessons, or parts of lessons, were observed by the inspector, of which three were joint observations with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, all the teaching staff, and the school's Hertfordshire Improvement Partner.
- There were 20 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Parents' views were also sought through discussions at the start and end of the school day.
- The inspector also took account of the 20 questionnaires completed by members of the school staff.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own data on pupils' current progress, planning and monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, documents relating to safeguarding, and the minutes of various meetings.

Inspection team

Nigel Grimshaw, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils usually leave at the end of Year 4 to attend the local middle school, whilst the remaining small numbers of pupils stay at the school until the end of Year 6 before leaving to attend the secondary school in the neighbouring town. There were, therefore, too few pupils remaining for the school's results to be meaningfully compared with the government's floor targets, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- Plans have been agreed for a building extension to open in September 2014 which will almost double the number of pupils on roll.
- Nearly all the pupils are from White British backgrounds and there are currently no pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the additional funding provided for children in the care of the local authority, from service families, and those children known to be eligible for free school meals (the pupil premium) is below average. There are currently no children who are looked after by the local authority and no pupils from service families.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and pupils who have special educational needs supported through school action is well below the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus, or who have a statement of special educational needs is in line with the national average.
- The school operates a Breakfast Club and an After School Club.
- There is a privately run pre-school provision on the school site that is subject to a separate inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attainment in writing for the more able pupils by ensuring teachers:
 - provide more opportunities for research and extended writing in other subjects
 - plan more opportunities for pupils to develop and extend their punctuation skills.
 - insist pupils take more care when presenting their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good.

- Following a period of unsettled leadership at the school, results dipped in 2010 and 2011 before improving significantly in 2012 following the appointment of the new headteacher and changes to the governing body. The school's own data indicates results are on track to improve even more by the end of this current year.
- Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage because the induction procedures are good and the teaching is consistently good or outstanding.
- Most pupils leave the school at the end of Year 4, which has a major impact on the outcomes for the school by the end of Year 6. Numbers in the Year 6 cohort become extremely small and the test results of each pupil represent a large percentage of the year group. Consequently, attainment can easily fluctuate significantly year-on-year.
- The outcomes for pupils at the end of Year 4 show that the pupils progress at a faster rate than expected in reading, writing and mathematics. This represents good achievement as children join the school with starting points that are only broadly in line with the skills and knowledge expected for their age.
- The teaching is now consistently good or better in the other three classes and, consequently, the good progress is maintained throughout the school.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are well known by all the staff. Work is set at an appropriate level for them and they receive good support as individuals or in small groups and, consequently, their progress is good.
- There were not enough pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in 2012 to comment on their attainment without identifying them. However, the school is aware of the need to raise standards for all eligible pupils across the school. The leaders have spent the pupil premium funding effectively, using it to provide additional teaching time to boost the progress of identified pupils and to improve information technology programmes for use by pupils. The school's current records indicate that eligible pupils are closing the gap in both English and mathematics.
- Progress in reading has improved. The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) is outstanding in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The combination of the excellent subject knowledge of the teacher is coupled with a quick pace of learning to ensure that pupils are now making exceptional progress and are in a strong position to thrive as they move through the school. They all say that they enjoy reading and read for pleasure outside school.
- Pupils enjoy having targets to achieve in reading, writing and mathematics. The targets are related to the national curriculum levels and the pupils are clear about where they are and what they need to do to improve to the next level.
- All parents have commented that they are extremely happy with the progress made by their children, both through the Parent View questionnaire and through conversations with the inspector.
- The last inspection team asked the school to improve the challenge for the more able pupils in mathematics. The school has successfully achieved this and the more able pupils now do better

than national averages in this subject. However, the more able pupils' writing is now below expected levels and the school has recognised the need to address this. The actions taken by the school have not yet had time to impact on the results.

The quality of teaching is good.

- From the school's own records it is clear that the quality of teaching has improved over time. This is because of the careful monitoring of classroom practice by school leaders and the guidance given to all teachers on how to improve their teaching skills.
- Teachers work hard and successfully to make learning as relevant and motivating as possible for the pupils. This was very evident in a Year 2/3 class lesson where the children were writing letters to their favourite author about how to make their own writing better. As one pupil said, 'I can't wait to get to school in the morning'.
- The staff have created an attractive, stimulating and informative learning environment around the school that undoubtedly supports good learning. The use of common themes across the school has led to opportunities for pupils to develop ideas and share them with other pupils.
- Teachers make effective use of a range of resources, including information and communication technology, such as the use of the interactive whiteboards and the use of visualisers to share a pupil's work with the rest of the class.
- The teaching of reading is a strength. In the Year 1/2 class, the teacher was working with a group of pupils sharing a reading text. The teacher picked up quickly on any pupil's misconceptions and used these, not only to make corrections, but also to enhance vocabulary, comprehension skills and fluency.
- Pupils enjoy having targets to achieve in reading, writing and mathematics. The targets are related to the national curriculum levels and the pupils are clear about where they are and what they need to do to improve to the next level.
- The teachers provide very good guidance to pupils on how to improve their work when they mark their books. Time is given to pupils to follow up the teachers' comments, as in the upper Key Stage 2 class where the pupils added their own suggestions on how to improve their work. The pupils value the fact that they know how to improve, and this is a key reason why progress has been enhanced.
- The teaching promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well. The successful use of 'talk partners' in lessons shows that pupils listen to each other and show respect for each other's views.
- The school leaders have introduced new schemes for improving handwriting and grammar but these have not yet had time to have a sufficient impact. Pupils do not take sufficient care when presenting their work, and expectations from teachers are not high enough in this respect.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good.

- The pupils are highly motivated and keen to learn and attitudes to learning are good.
- Pupils want to succeed in their work and so the large majority show perseverance and concentration. As a result, behaviour in lessons is always good and is often exemplary. There is no evidence of poor behaviour ever disrupting lessons.
- The pupils behave well around the school. They are considerate and polite to each other and play together harmoniously and feel safe in school. One parent described the school as 'a very happy community'.
- Pupils and their parents agree unanimously that behaviour is good and that there are no bullying issues. Pupils have confidence that the adults in school work with them to ensure that they feel safe at school and enjoy coming to school. Pupils have a good awareness of the different forms that bullying may take, and have a good knowledge of how to use the internet safely.
- Attendance figures have improved significantly over the last three years. This year's current figures show that attendance is expected to be above the national average.
- Attitudes are not outstanding because pupils are not careful enough when presenting their work.

The leadership and management are good.

- Following the last inspection three years ago, the school had a period of very unsettled leadership before the new headteacher was appointed. Since taking up post, the headteacher has concentrated on improving the quality of teaching and making it more consistent. As one parent said, 'The headteacher has brought about real improvements since he came'.
 - The improvements in teaching have largely been because the school leaders and all the staff value the importance of professional development. As a result, teachers have gained in confidence and teach more adventurously.
 - These gains in confidence have also improved their subject leadership skills and increased the rigour with which they check on standards and progress. Staff have increased their knowledge of all the pupils in school as individuals and have ensured that the work planned meets their needs and interests well.
 - The headteacher holds regular meetings with staff to check on the progress of all pupils and particularly to identify any pupils who may be slipping behind. Prompt action is taken to give an extra boost to their learning with extra adult support.
 - The school has developed good working relationships with other local schools for the benefit of pupils and staff.
 - The local authority has provided good support over recent times, particularly during the period of unsettled leadership. The school improvement partner has supported the staff and governors through an agreed training programme that has been valued by the school.
 - The range of subjects provided by the school is good. The leaders have adopted a 'whole school theme' approach, which motivates all the pupils and leads to real enthusiasm for learning. A
-

recent theme on 'Step Back in Time' resulted in the pupils entering school via a model of Doctor Who's Tardis in the entrance area! From this theme the older pupils wrote a screenplay, filmed the action, edited the tapes and produced a twenty-minute film of real quality. However, generally, there are insufficient opportunities planned for pupils to undertake research and extended writing in other subjects, particularly the more able pupils.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The new Chair of Governors, well supported by the Vice-Chair, has created a unified and much stronger governing body that now works closely with the staff. They are more actively involved in monitoring and holding the school to account for the standards achieved. The training provided for the governors has ensured that they have a good knowledge of the pupils' attainment and progress and how the school compares to other schools. They are clear about what makes teaching effective and can therefore recognise the recent improvements in this area. They have ensured that systems are in place for the approval of pay rises that are linked to how well staff are performing. Financial management is robust, including evaluating the effectiveness of the use of the pupil premium funding. Staff and governors work together to ensure that pupils are treated equally and that there is no discrimination. The school's procedures for safeguarding pupils and staff fully meet statutory requirements.

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	117154
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	412978

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	92
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul King
Headteacher	Jonty Hall
Date of previous school inspection	23 March 2010
Telephone number	01438 861285
Fax number	01438 861222
Email address	admin@walkern.herts.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013

