

Ickleford Primary School

Arlesey Road, Ickleford, Hitchin, SG5 3TG

Inspection dates 8–9 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils do well in reading and mathematics and reach standards that are well above average.
- Children in the Reception class become more confident and less reliant on adults. They develop a good knowledge of the sounds that letters make.
- Reading is taught and promoted well throughout the school, so that older pupils enjoy reading widely and confidently.
- Teaching is typically good, and some is outstanding, particularly when teachers modify lessons to make sure all of the pupils are learning new skills and knowledge quickly.
- Pupils are taught an interesting range of topics and themes. Art and music have a high profile and, along with 'values education', contribute considerably to the pupils' personal development.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent and they feel safe in school. They are very attentive and concentrate on their work. Attendance levels are high.
- Parents hold the school in high regard. All of the parents who responded to the Parent View questionnaire would recommend the school to others.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils are not doing as well in writing as they are in reading and mathematics. Although the school has taken steps to increase the rate of progress in writing, it is not as fast as it should be.
- Leaders' and governors' plans for improvement are not sufficiently sharply focused to make sure that pupils' progress in writing accelerates rapidly.
- The headteacher's checking of the quality of teaching is not incisive enough for it to become outstanding.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 16 lessons. They spoke to pupils in lessons and at playtime, and met with two groups of pupils to get their views of the school.
- The inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school’s plans for improvement, the minutes of meetings, and policies about keeping pupils safe. They also examined the work in some pupils’ books and a range of data about their progress.
- The inspectors held discussions with teachers, the headteacher, and the Chair of the Governing Body.
- The views of 45 parents were analysed through the Parent View website. The inspector also considered the views expressed in questionnaires returned by members of staff.

Inspection team

Christopher Parker, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Lynne Bradbury

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller than average primary school.
- Most of the pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are both well below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs at school action (pupils who need extra support with their learning) is below average. The proportion at school action plus, or who have a statement of special educational needs, is broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is below the national average. This funding supports those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, any in the care of the local authority, and pupils who have a parent serving in the armed services.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Intensify the focus of teachers' efforts to improve pupils' writing, so that more of them make rapid progress and reach higher standards by:
 - making sure that pupils' work is always marked in a way that gives them clear and well-focused guidance on how to improve their writing
 - encouraging pupils to use every opportunity to write purposefully in a range of contexts
 - expecting high standards of handwriting and presentation from all pupils at all times.
- Ensure leaders and managers take a sharper and more focused approach to checking precisely how well the school is doing and plan for improvement in greater detail by:
 - making sure that checks on the quality of teaching evaluate its impact on pupils' learning and progress, and provide clear pointers to teachers to show how lessons can be improved
 - setting clear – and, wherever possible, measurable – targets and timescales against which leaders and governors can evaluate the success of improvement plans
 - carefully analysing the impact of the spending of pupil premium funds on the achievement of those pupils it is allocated to support.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Most children start the Reception class with the knowledge and skills expected of that age. They make good progress, notably in their early reading, and broaden their knowledge and skills through both teacher-led activities and those which they choose themselves. As a result they grow in confidence and are increasingly able to work and play without direct supervision.
- Pupils continue to make good progress as they move through the school. However, last year, this was faster in reading and mathematics than it was in writing because a few more-able pupils did not reach the standards expected of them. Currently, pupils in all year groups are making good progress in their work books, although progress in writing is faster in some years than others.
- Pupils do well in reading. Those pupils who were assessed in Year 1 to have weak early reading skills have benefited from extra help, and now use their knowledge of the sounds that letters make to successfully tackle unfamiliar words. As a result they now read with increased accuracy and fluency. Older pupils talk confidently about the books they read and the authors they like.
- In many lessons the teachers modify tasks for pupils of differing abilities. This, along with well-focused adult support and the use of a range of good resources, also helps disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs to make good progress. The school carefully checks the progress of these pupils through frequent meetings about each one's progress.
- Pupils do well in a range of subjects. In Year 4, for example, pupils are using internet research to gather detailed information about life in Roman times. Music also has a high profile in the school, and all pupils in Year 3 have the opportunity to learn to play the cello. Many older pupils continue to play a range of instruments. Artwork, throughout the school, is of a high standard.
- The school has taken steps to increase the rate of progress in writing this year. It has used a range of approaches, recently giving a much higher profile to punctuation. In addition the whole school starts the week with a writing task, although not all opportunities to write in other subjects are used to full effect and not all pupils write neatly as they should.
- Pupils supported through the pupil premium made faster progress than their classmates in Year 6 last year, but their attainment was about a term behind them in English and in mathematics. The school is using these funds to provide additional teaching support to help these pupils to catch up, but it is not evaluating the impact on their learning and progress closely enough.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is usually good, and some is outstanding. In most lessons, tasks are set at the right level for the pupils. In discussion pupils said they 'like the challenges' their teachers set for them in mathematics. Most lessons are well paced and involve the pupils in activities that they find interesting and enjoyable.
- Where teaching is outstanding this is because the teachers continually modify the lesson so that all pupils are constantly engaged and made to think. For example, in a Year 3 lesson, pupils made rapid progress in their knowledge and use of angles and direction because the teacher checked and amended their learning throughout the lesson.

- The teachers create a very positive climate for learning. The school's values are positively promoted through assemblies. Cooperation and collaboration are encouraged and developed in many lessons. Expectations of behaviour, concentration and perseverance are high, and pupils respond positively.
- Relationships between the teachers and their pupils are very positive. For example, in Year 1 the teacher nurtures and encourages pupils to contribute confidently to lessons. Consequently, in a lesson about adjectives and similes, pupils made many interesting suggestions that resulted in them improving their sentences.
- The adults who work alongside the teachers explain what they want the pupils to do very clearly. This is particularly helpful to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. In some lessons the teachers also provide well-chosen prompts to help these pupils make good progress.
- Reading is usually well taught. In the Reception class the teacher develops the children's early reading well. In guided reading lessons the teachers promote older pupils' skills to infer and deduce from the texts. They also encourage an understanding of the strategies that authors use to 'hook' the reader's attention and interest.
- The teachers mark the pupils' work in detail. The comments they make are largely helpful, but are not always focused sharply enough on what the pupils should do next to improve and make rapid progress. In addition, pupils do not always have the opportunity to respond to the teachers' comments. Marking that brings rapid improvement is not consistent across the school.
- On occasions, some pupils are given work that is relatively easy and does not immediately encourage them to think really hard. Only later in the lesson are they given the more demanding work that they are capable of, and this sometimes reduces the speed and scope of their progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils are proud of their school. They enjoy school, and this is reflected in the above-average rates of attendance. Pupils welcome the opportunities that they are provided to learn to play a musical instrument and to attend sports clubs. The older pupils appreciate the residential visits arranged in both Year 5 and Year 6.
- The school's values are strongly promoted in assemblies. The value of friendship was very successfully promoted through activities and themes that encouraged pupils to think deeply about how well they knew their friends. The Year 3 class assembly was full of the enjoyment and enthusiasm for learning shown by pupils throughout the school.
- Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. They say that their lessons are never interrupted by pupils misbehaving. Parents who responded to the questionnaire are all highly positive about pupils' behaviour, and unanimously agreed that their child is happy, feels safe and is well looked after at school.
- Pupils have no concerns about behaviour on the playground. Their games are exuberant and good natured. They are very considerate to one another. They cite rare instances of pupils falling out, but are very confident that their teachers will act quickly to resolve such incidents so that they soon become friends again.

- Pupils know how to stay safe on the internet. They say that bullying is very rare, and say they would turn immediately to their teachers if they felt that someone was being unpleasant to them. Older pupils demonstrate increasing maturity and say they can sort out minor disagreements themselves.
- The school can point to instances of pupils joining the school with behaviour and learning difficulties, whose behaviour has improved quickly as a result of support from outside agencies and the school's close work with parents. This has enabled these pupils to play a greater part in class activities and to help them to improve their learning and progress.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and assessment leader carefully track the progress of all pupils. Their analysis of last year's results led them to increase teachers' expectations of how much progress pupils should make and what pupils themselves believe they might achieve. Targets for pupils' progress, particularly in Key Stage 2, are now very demanding.
 - The appraisal of teachers is carried out conscientiously and systematically, but the targets set for the teachers as a result of the analysis of pupils' performance are not routinely included. Nevertheless, targets are linked carefully to both the professional development needs of each member of staff and to the school's priorities.
 - The subjects, themes and topics that the pupils are taught provide them with many interesting opportunities to learn and make good progress. The teachers create opportunities to write in a range of subjects, although not all are used to full effect. The teachers lead many visits to places of interest that enrich the pupils' learning.
 - The headteacher regularly checks the quality of teaching. While these observations maintain the quality of teaching, they are not incisive enough to help teachers to maximise the impact of their teaching. This is because observations do not have a sufficiently sharp focus on how teachers might extend pupils' learning and increase their progress.
 - The school did not purchase support from the local authority's improvement service last year, and consequently, the local authority did not influence the school's performance; the school preferred to use links with local schools for support and training. However, it has recently decided to buy into local authority services for the coming year, which will involve the school seeking external validation by the authority of the accuracy of its self evaluation.
 - The school's plans for improvement are, rightly, focused on improving the pupils' literacy skills. They set out activities which aim to accelerate progress in writing. However, the criteria against which the headteacher and governors intend to evaluate success are not precise enough. They are not sufficiently detailed about when actions will be completed or how their impact will be evaluated.
- **The governance of the school:**
- Governors keep a keen eye on how well the school's resources are used to meet the needs of the pupils. While they have reviewed what the pupil premium is spent on, they have yet to evaluate its impact on the achievement of those pupils who are entitled to additional support.
 - Governors are involved in a wide range of activities in school, which allows them to assess for themselves how well the school is doing. They receive regular reviews of the quality of

teaching, and have received training to enable them to make greater use of data showing how well pupils are performing. While governors review the school's plans for improvement, they are not checking the extent of its impact rigorously enough.

- Governors set the headteacher targets, and assure themselves that the teachers' appraisals are carried out diligently. Any increases in teachers' pay are linked to their performance.
- Governors check that arrangements to make sure that the pupils are kept as safe as possible are up to date and meet current 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	117401
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	412442

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	212
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Miles Maxwell
Headteacher	Sue Dury
Date of previous school inspection	4 July 2008
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