

Letchmore Infants' and Nursery School

Letchmore Road, Stevenage, SG1 3PS

Inspection dates 21–22 May 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Pupils' achievement is high because the outstanding teaching has a strong focus on encouraging them to find things out for themselves and because teachers use probing questions to challenge the pupils to think independently. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is above the national average.
- Children in the Reception classes make an excellent start in reading, writing and number work. The outdoor space is well used and planned experiences and tasks are rich and varied.
- Teaching is outstanding. The focus is always on making lessons interesting, enjoyable and setting work at the correct level for pupils.
- Pupils' progress is very well checked in reading, writing and mathematics so that staff intervene very quickly if there is the slightest indication of any pupil falling behind. All staff use the information well to ensure that work is pitched at just the right level.
- Behaviour is exemplary throughout the school. Pupils conduct themselves exceptionally well in lessons, at playtimes and around the school. They are courteous and respectful, and contribute keenly during lessons.
- School leaders, teachers and staff have high expectations for the pupils and for themselves. They work closely with each other and with parents.
- Leadership of teaching is excellent because leaders at all levels have continually developed the skills of all staff, including teaching assistants, to maintain high expectations for pupils' progress in learning.
- Governors play a full and active role in leading the school forward. They are regular visitors, both formally and informally, and have a clear understanding of the rate of pupils' progress and quality of teaching.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons. This included joint observations with the senior leaders and observations of pupils receiving additional support. In addition, the inspection team examined pupils' work in their books and listened to pupils read.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, staff with responsibilities and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 23 parental responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and the 19 staff surveys returned to the inspection team.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documentation, including policies and improvement plans and documentation relating to staff development, pupil achievement, teaching, the curriculum, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Richard Blackmore, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Rosemary Saunders

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized school.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is in line with the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus is also broadly average as is the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium, which is additional funding for children who are looked after by the local authority, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and the children of service families, is lower than average.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. A number of other ethnic groups are represented in varying very small proportions.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further refine the assessment system to check pupils' progress in a wider range of subjects.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Standards over several years have remained significantly high and show that pupils achieve outstandingly well. Published data, while still indicating significantly above-average standards overall, show a decline over the three years to 2012. The inspectors carried out rigorous checks on the progress of pupils in those three years, and confirmed the school's view that, from pupils' individual starting points, progress has remained rapid and sustained in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The large majority of children start school with skills that are typical for their age, although there is an increasing proportion with lower ability, on entry. They get off to an excellent start because of the exciting days that are carefully planned in the Early Years Foundation Stage. In the Nursery and Reception classes, expectations are high and children make at least good progress.
- As a result of outstanding teaching, pupils of all abilities make rapid progress. This reflects the school's commitment to equal opportunities, making sure that all have the same chance to succeed.
- Every opportunity is taken to make sure that pupils of all abilities and backgrounds can apply their knowledge and skills across the full range of learning activities. At the end of Year 2 in 2012, the attainment of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium was two terms behind their classmates in reading, nearly a year, in writing, and about six months, in mathematics. School records show that in the past year, progress for this group of pupils has accelerated and, comparing their attainment related to their age, the gap with their classmates has narrowed significantly.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs requiring extra support are identified early and accurately and play a full part in lessons. They make excellent progress because teachers and support staff work well together to meet these pupils' needs through skilful support in class and highly effective small group teaching. This also applies to pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language, so that they make similarly excellent progress.
- The strong focus on reading is very successful because staff help pupils to remember and practice their knowledge of the sounds that letters make (phonics). Children in the Nursery and Reception are taught phonics exceptionally well and how they combine to form words, one pupil, typical of others, saying, 'I love phonics!' This strong focus on reading is sustained throughout the school and has been particularly important over the last three years as skills in literacy when pupils start school have been lower than in mathematics.
- Numeracy skills develop very quickly because pupils are helped to understand when it is best to calculate mentally and when written methods would be more effective. It is also because pupils have the opportunity to practice their knowledge of mathematics in different and frequent real-life practical problems.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teachers and support staff have very high expectations, strong subject knowledge, and have formed very effective relationships with pupils. An outstanding feature in many lessons is the planning of activities to make learning as interesting as possible for pupils. This results in high

levels of commitment to work by all pupils.

- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children learn exceptionally well because the teachers give them plenty of chances to find things out for themselves. Assessment of work is accurate and ensures children are challenged to extend their skills. The focus is on practical activities and these quickly help children to make very rapid progress. They greatly enjoy using pretend areas such as the shop, which has items for sale using stones as the currency. This made the children think hard about how much items cost, in stones, and how much change they needed.
- The teaching of literacy is particularly strong. This is because teachers clearly show pupils how to write effectively and generate ideas. For example, in a poetry lesson the teacher and teaching assistant read a poem aloud to highlight the important features of a lullaby and related these to the pupils' own experiences.
- A wide range of adults make valuable contributions during lessons, including the highly experienced and knowledgeable teaching assistants and other volunteers, including parents. Staff comment very precisely on pupils' work regularly and provide encouragement where appropriate. Occasionally progress in subjects other than English and mathematics is more limited because assessment information in these areas is not used sufficiently to plan lessons.
- Teachers make the aim of the lesson, and how to achieve it, clear. Teachers display and consistently refer back to these learning objectives and success criteria. This, coupled with attractive and stimulating displays, enables pupils to check their achievements and make gains in their learning.
- Teachers regularly check pupils' understanding in lessons. Where necessary, they give additional guidance or tips on how best to approach tasks so that all pupils make excellent progress in their learning. For example, during an outstanding Year 2 mathematics lesson, the teacher noticed that a number of pupils did not fully understand how to break numbers up to make calculating more accurate. She adeptly asked a range of questions to focus pupils on the key information which resulted in a much clearer understanding of the strategy.
- Teachers often inspire their pupils through probing questions that make pupils think hard. They also adjust the learning activities according to pupils' interests and current events, and this focus on pupils' interest helps them to concentrate for long periods.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Behaviour is exemplary. Records of behaviour incidents show that any minor shortfall is rare. As a result pupils feel very safe in this school. They know how to keep themselves safe, and show concern for the safety and well-being of others. Pupils work within a culture of shared responsibility, where staff act promptly to ensure the well-being of pupils.
- Pupils take part in learning with great enthusiasm, are very quick to help each other in their work and greatly enjoy school. Pupils describe the school very warmly. This attitude is typical across the school from the youngest to the oldest both inside and outside of the classroom.
- Pupils are highly considerate towards one another. They told inspectors that unkindness is very rare and that there is no actual bullying, such as racist or cyber-bullying. They reported that, if they have any concerns, they would have a word with an adult and feel completely confident that it would be quickly sorted out.

- The school manages behaviour exceptionally well. Rules are clear and applied consistently. Pupils respond well to the reward system and take pride in receiving commendations for their exemplary behaviour and approach to their work.
- Pupils' attend school regularly and they are punctual at the start of the school day, full of enthusiasm and keen to start the day's learning.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Outstanding leadership is demonstrated through the ambitious drive and determination of the highly effective headteacher and deputy headteacher. They strive for excellence in pupils' academic and personal development. The desire to ensure pupils are well-rounded individuals, who are exceptionally well prepared for the next phase in their education, runs through all that the school does.
- The calibre of teaching has been maintained at a high level since the previous inspection because the checks made on its quality by leaders and governors are extremely rigorous.
- Senior leaders, including governors, have a robust view of the school's strengths and where it can make further improvements. They update their self-evaluation document regularly and this drives their development plans, which are highly coherent and detailed.
- School leaders have high expectations of the teachers and this has driven up the quality of the teaching. They encourage teachers to continue developing their expertise through professional development and training. Leaders visit lessons frequently and provide valuable guidance to teachers on how they can improve. Teachers' targets for improvement are specifically linked to improvements in pupils' progress.
- The wide range of learning activities offers an excellent balance of basic skills and enrichment of arts and physical development. Music and singing add richness to the school. The opportunities for sport are excellent and there are strong partnerships. For example, pupils were absorbed in physical education sessions led by students from the nearby secondary school. These events, combined with a vast array of visits and visitors, add to pupils' obvious enjoyment of school and extend successfully pupils' understanding of other faiths and cultures. The school is working on developing improved tracking systems to enable pupils' progress to be measured more precisely across all the subjects it offers.
- Support from the local authority is appropriate and effective, especially the provision of advice and training.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have an excellent understanding of pupil performance by regularly scrutinising information about pupils' achievement; regularly asking questions of senior staff if they spot variations. Governors work closely with senior leaders to ensure the performance of individual teachers is well managed so that the quality of teaching continues to be outstanding. They understand the link between pay and performance and ensure that producing outstanding results in terms of pupils' outcomes is reflected appropriately in pay. The budget is managed effectively, including checks on the impact of the pupil premium funding. Governors set the headteacher challenging targets and check that any salary awards are linked to teachers attaining their targets. The governing body fulfils its statutory duties very well, particularly ensuring that safeguarding arrangements meet requirements, because they have attended a range of training including understanding data and health and safety 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	117151
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	413350

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	240
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Becky Guy
Headteacher	Roma Marshall
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2008
Telephone number	01438 234400
Fax number	01438 234401
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