

Laburnum Lower School

Laburnum Road, Sandy, SG19 1HQ

Inspection dates 13–14 June 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.

- Pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, achieve well because teaching is good.
- Children settle quickly and make good progress in the nursery.
- They make good progress in all areas of learning in Reception. Staff teach phonics (linking letters and sounds) effectively to small groups of children daily.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. Their behaviour is good and they feel safe.
- Leadership and management are good. Staff work well as a team to identify the right priorities for improvement by regularly checking on teaching and pupils' progress.
- New governors have a wealth of expertise to offer, and with staff have brought about improvements in teaching and pupils' attainment. Their regular visits mean that they know how well the school is performing.
- Parents are very supportive and say that the school is 'one big, happy family'.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A small amount of teaching requires improvement when tasks are not matched closely to pupils' differing ability levels, particularly during lesson introductions.
- Standards in writing are below those in reading and mathematics in most year groups throughout the school.
- Planning in the nursery and Reception does not link indoor with outdoor learning very well so it takes longer for children to acquire new skills, particularly in writing.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 17 lessons taught by seven teachers. Two of these lessons were seen together with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with a group of six Year 4 pupils and the pupil council, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and another governor, the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior leaders.
- A discussion took place with a representative from the local authority about the support and advice it gives to the school.
- There were 56 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) by the end of the inspection. The inspectors took account of these, and also sought the views of parents and carers as they arrived at school with their children.
- The inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a range of documents, including the school’s own information on pupils’ recent and current progress, planning for school improvement and records of governing body meetings, checks on teaching and behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Joseph Peacock, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

John Burrige

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school but the number of pupils is rising. It is in a consortium called The Pinnacle Trust with seven other schools.
- The nursery has places for 60 children on a part-time basis, and there are currently 56. Flexible arrangements allow parents to choose 15 hours per week for their children to attend the nursery. The school has five single-age classes from Reception to Year 4.
- Almost all pupils are of White British origin. A few children from nearby Traveller sites are sometimes taught at the school, but none were attending at the time of the inspection.
- The proportion of pupils supported by additional government funding through the pupil premium is below average. In this school, it applies to pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion who are supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- A new headteacher joined the stable, experienced staff team in April 2012. There have been many changes to the governing body over the past year.
- Once pupils are admitted, they usually remain at the school until transferring to the local middle school.
- The school has its own open-air, heated swimming pool and a new dining hall was built in 2010.
- A Children's Centre was added to the nursery accommodation in 2009. It is managed separately and is not included in this inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make more teaching good or better and raise standards, particularly in writing, by:
 - ensuring that tasks are challenging and more closely matched to the different abilities of pupils in all parts of lessons
 - providing time for pupils to respond to teachers' marking comments and further improve their work, especially in writing
 - working with colleagues in other schools in the Pinnacle Trust to explore ways to raise attainment in writing.
- Review lesson planning in the nursery and Reception to better link skills being taught indoors and outdoors, so children can practise, learn and consolidate new skills more effectively.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start in the nursery with skills and understanding that are well below those typical for their age, and particularly low in key areas such as communication, language and numeracy. Teaching is good, helping all to settle quickly and achieve well.
- Good teaching continues in Reception. Staff in the nursery and Reception class encourage children to ask and respond to questions, helping to improve their communication skills. Most make good progress in learning letters and the sounds they make (phonics) as they are grouped by ability and taught in small groups.
- Staff carefully assess children's progress as they tackle activities indoors and outside in the well-resourced learning areas. This ensures that they know how well children are doing, and the skills that need to be further developed. They make good progress but standards are still below average, particularly in writing, when they move into Year 1.
- Pupils' good progress in reading, writing and mathematics continues in Key Stages 1 and 2 because teaching is effective. Attainment in reading and mathematics has improved significantly as a result and is above the level expected by Year 4. Attainment in writing is in line with expectations for pupils of this age. It is not as high as in reading and mathematics because tasks are not always sufficiently challenging for pupils of different abilities. Some do not achieve well enough to make up for starting with lower levels of skills in writing.
- Achievement in reading has been improved significantly because of the effective action by staff to raise standards. Home-school reading targets, a more consistently taught phonics programme and guided reading sessions with new books are successfully encouraging reading. Parents are playing their part by listening to their children read and recording comments in the home-school communication book.
- The school is beginning to shift the emphasis from reading to writing, and trying to close the gap in attainment by increasing opportunities for pupils to write in literacy sessions and other subjects. When pupils work in groups, tasks are not always sufficiently challenging for pupils of different ability levels and long introductions to lessons make it difficult for some pupils to maintain their concentration.
- In mathematics, tasks are usually challenging and pupils demonstrate secure strategies when comparing units of volume or learning different ways to multiply numbers. At the end of each lesson, pupils are asked to show how secure they feel about their new learning and explain why. This ensures that they understand new learning before moving on.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are provided with appropriate tasks and supported closely in lessons by teachers and teaching assistants. Most achieve as well as other pupils.
- The school provides individual help for pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium. School records show that this helps to improve their attainment in English and mathematics. Too few pupils were known to be eligible for free school meals in 2012 to comment on their attainment in national tests without identifying them, but they also typically make good progress.
- Pupils of all ages use computers confidently and competently in lessons. This enhances learning

and enables most to make good progress. Year 1 pupils demonstrated skills beyond their years when using the internet to find images linked to a science project on materials and writing about them.

- All pupils are able to swim or have confidence in water thanks to their eagerly anticipated and enjoyable twice-weekly lessons in the swimming pool. Parent volunteers support staff, helping to keep all pupils safe.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is mostly good. In some of the lessons seen it was outstanding, but there were also occasions when it required improvement.
- Staff manage behaviour consistently well, and normally deal with any rare incidents of inappropriate behaviour immediately and effectively.
- In the nursery, adults support children well, giving them all the encouragement necessary to learn and make progress as they join in with 'Fitness Friday', finish Fathers Day cards or learn numbers to five. The outdoor area for the nursery provides children with a wealth of opportunities for adventurous play, to grow plants and to make music.
- In Reception, there is a strong emphasis on developing communication skills and promoting social skills. Children work well together both indoors and out, supported closely by adults. However, planning in both classes does not always make the most of opportunities to consolidate new skills by linking indoor and outdoor learning.
- Teachers make frequent and accurate checks on pupils' rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics, so any pupils who are falling behind are quickly identified and supported. By tracking progress as closely as they do, they make sure that pupils of all ability levels are achieving well.
- Where teaching was outstanding, pupils were highly motivated by teachers' high expectations and infectious enthusiasm. Pupils in these lessons were keen to 'zoom on' independently to complete multiplication tasks or edit a letter they had written.
- In the few cases where teaching requires improvement, tasks are not sufficiently matched to the different ability levels within the class or in different parts of a lesson. Pupils find it hard to keep up and lose concentration during lengthy introductions to the whole class when learning is not appropriate for them.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because their individual learning needs are recognised and planning ensures that they have tasks relevant to their ability level.
- Reading is taught well, so pupils build effectively on their phonic knowledge to read accurately and to spell simple words correctly. In mathematics, teachers plan practical and problem-solving tasks to engage and interest pupils.
- Teachers conscientiously mark pupils' work but do not always provide time for them to respond to marking comments on how to improve their work. This means that in writing in particular, mistakes are often repeated. This holds back the progress some make.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' good behaviour ensures that all enjoy school and do well. In lessons, pupils usually listen attentively and work together well. In Year 1, they shared suggestions for redrafting their 'shape poems', for example. The very small number of fixed-term exclusions in the past year shows how well most behave.
- Pupils agree that they feel safe and that 'everyone is friendly here'. This reflects the caring and supportive relationships between staff and pupils. Nearly all of the parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire agreed that pupils are safe and well looked after.
- Attendance was improving steadily for three years, but is currently below the level found in other schools nationally. There is no persistent absence. The rates are adversely affected by families taking holidays during school time. The school is doing all it can to promote attendance and get the full support of parents to bring about improvement. Discussions are taking place with partner schools in the Pinnacle Trust to find a common approach to this shared problem.
- Parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire had very positive views about the school. They agreed that behaviour is good. The vast majority agreed that concerns are handled quickly and effectively and that they would recommend the school to others.
- Pupils have a good understanding for their age of different types of bullying. They know that name-calling and hitting others are wrong. They say that 'We are very anti-bullying here' and it only happens 'a tiny bit'. School records show that very few incidents of bullying or racist behaviour occur.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has quickly established a strong working relationship with the deputy headteacher and staff. All share the vision of establishing an outstanding school. Responsibility for assessing how well pupils are doing and analysing data is a team effort and enables support to be targeted effectively on specific pupils or groups of pupils. This is having a significant impact on raising standards.
- The headteacher and staff check teaching in detail through termly lesson observations, and this is helping to make sure that teaching is increasingly promoting effective learning. In line with most schools in the Pinnacle Trust, staff are focusing on improving writing skills.
- The leadership of the teaching in the nursery and Reception classes, and for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, is good. Parents and carers are fully informed about their children's progress and are very positive about the quality of leadership and level of care provided. The school makes good use of outside specialists for support and advice.
- The headteacher and the governing body make sure that teachers' pay rises are closely linked to their performance. The national Teachers' Standards are used effectively to judge the quality of teaching, so secure judgements are made on how well teachers are doing their jobs.
- The local authority is happy with the way standards are rising, and is confident that the headteacher and staff can continue the upward trend. Checks are routinely made to ensure improvement is maintained.

- There is a strong emphasis on developing literacy and numeracy skills. Extra-curricular activities such as a drawing club, 'speed-stack' club and others for sport and music contribute to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Religious studies, topics about Aborigines and stories about different cultures, including Travellers' way of life, support pupils' achievement and help them understand values such as tolerance and respect.
- The welfare and safety of pupils has a high profile, as reflected in the excellent new policy document which guides staff on how best to handle complaints and respond to parental concerns. It stresses the need to investigate fairly rather than being adversarial. Virtually all parents and carers agree that staff treat every pupil equally, their children are safe and looked after well, and that discrimination is not tolerated in any form.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Many new governors have joined the governing body and they share the belief of the passionate, enthusiastic Chair of the Governing Body that every child deserves the opportunity to shine. Their regular visits give them a good knowledge and understanding of the quality of teaching and how well pupils are doing. All study performance data and are able to see how well different groups of pupils are doing compared to others nationally. They are beginning to focus their attention on helping the school to check how well it is tackling the areas identified as priorities for improvement. The governing body reviews the performance of the headteacher and other teachers each year to determine pay and promotion. Governors are well trained, with most attending training events each year. Their personal expertise is used to good effect to support their work and to challenge the school with a view to raising standards, improving teaching and ensuring that there is no cause for concern about children's welfare or safety. A termly governors' newsletter adds to the weekly newsletter from the school and ensures parents are kept fully informed. All current national requirements relating to employment and safeguarding are met. Governors manage financial resources well and carefully check the impact of pupil premium funding on the achievement of eligible pupils.

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	109477
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	413457

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

Type of school	First
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	167
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joanne Stephens
Headteacher	Tracey How
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2009
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