

Whitehill Junior School

Whitehill Road, Hitchin, SG4 9HT

Inspection dates 26–27 June 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.

- Most pupils reach standards above the national average. Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics during their time at the school.
- Pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. This is because they receive good support from teachers and other adults.
- Much of the teaching is good and some is outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers set interesting and exciting work which is at the right level. They ask questions which make pupils think deeply about their learning.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding. They are polite and caring towards each other. Pupils feel very safe in school. Their attendance is above average.
- The school teaches subjects through interesting themes and topics. This rich curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
- The highly-experienced headteacher has developed an effective team of leaders that have raised pupils' achievement significantly. Members of staff are proud to work at Whitehill Junior School.
- Governors are well informed and provide challenge as well as support to school leaders.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teaching in the school is of the exceptional quality seen in the very best lessons. In a few lessons, teachers do not make sufficient demands on pupils.
- At times, teachers do not give pupils sufficient advice on how to improve their work. Pupils are not always given enough time to respond to the comments teachers write in their books.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons, taught by nine teachers. Four of these lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors made shorter visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning in different subjects. They visited the Industry and Enterprise Day which replaced Year 6 pupils' usual lessons during the first day of the inspection. Inspectors listened to pupils read and attended an assembly.
- Inspectors met a group of pupils and talked to other pupils in lessons, in the playground and as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors saw pupils' written work during lessons and looked in greater depth at a selection of their books.
- Inspectors took account of the 44 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and two letters sent by parents. Inspectors spoke informally to parents as they brought their children to school at the start of the school day.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other school leaders and staff and two members of the governing body. Inspectors spoke informally with other members of staff. The responses to questionnaires completed by 10 members of staff were considered.
- Inspectors looked closely at a number of documents including the school's checks on how well it is doing and its plans for improvement. They went through the school's information about pupils' progress over time. Inspectors looked at records of the quality of teaching and at minutes of the governing body. They checked on how the school keeps its pupils safe and looked at records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Elizabeth Cooper, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Gillian Scobie

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is an average-sized junior school.
- The proportion of pupils entitled to support through the pupil premium, which provides additional resources for children looked after by the local authority and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is below average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is in line with the national average, with the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is just below the national average, as is the proportion at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- More pupils than usual join or leave the school other than at the normal times.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school has received several awards including Artsmark Gold and the Healthy Schools Status and is an Accredited Lead School for Mathematics Teaching.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
 - setting activities consistently at the right level of difficulty for pupils, so that more pupils make consistently good progress
 - making sure that the quality of marking is more even, so that pupils always know how to improve their work and are given time to follow up the guidance offered by their teachers
 - providing further opportunities for teachers to share ideas about how to make teaching and learning outstanding.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- When pupils enter the school in Year 3, their attainment is typical for their age, with some year groups above the national average. Over time, most go on to reach above-average standards by the time they leave Year 6.
- In 2012, pupils did well in writing, but their standards were not as high in reading and mathematics. However, one-third of the Year 6 pupils had entered the school later than at the start of Year 3. Given the generally lower starting points of these new entrants, it was clear that these pupils had nonetheless made good progress since arriving in the school and that pupils' achievement overall last year was good. The school gives pupils good support from whatever point they start.
- Most pupils now are doing well in both English and mathematics during Key Stage 2, because of the good teaching they receive. In a small number of lessons, pupils do not always have enough challenge because teachers do not consistently plan work at the right level of difficulty.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make progress that is at least as good as their classmates because teachers and other adults give them good support in their lessons. Similarly, pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve well.
- Pupils entitled to the pupil premium make good progress because the school has sensibly used the additional funding to provide extra help in lessons and small groups. In the 2012 mathematics tests, pupils eligible for the funding were ten months behind other pupils, with a gap of just over six months in English. However, pupils' work in lessons and in their books shows that pupils supported by the pupil premium are catching up in English and mathematics.
- Pupils are keen on reading books. Most pupils read books fluently and with expression, with a pupil enjoying the tongue-twisting opening sentences of *Mr Stink*. Pupils practise different kinds of writing, and the poetry and longer pieces of writing in their 'best books' show that many pupils develop imaginative use of language while improving their skills.
- Pupils develop a good grasp of how to solve problems in mathematics. In an outstanding mathematics lesson, Year 6 pupils used their mathematical skills to compare video-rental schemes from different companies. They moved confidently from using algebra to work out the best offer to displaying their findings in a graph.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good in most classes and, at times, it is outstanding. As a result, all groups of pupils across the school make good progress. However, in a few lessons pupils do not make rapid progress because teachers do not set work at the right level of difficulty. This is why teaching overall is good rather than outstanding.
- Teachers plan lessons that pupils are likely to find fun and explain what pupils are expected to learn clearly, so that lessons get off to a prompt start. They make good use of learning activities for pupils to work together in pairs or groups. This results in pupils pooling their ideas, with pupils respecting each other's views and making sure that everyone in the group can have their say.

- In most lessons, teachers use questions well to encourage pupils to think about their learning. This works particularly well when teachers ask pupils to explain their understanding in detail. On occasions, however, teachers do not always give pupils the opportunity to develop their answers in depth, and this means that not all pupils are fully stretched by the learning.
- The quality of teachers' marking is uneven. In the best examples, teachers write detailed comments on pupils' work, giving clear suggestions to help them improve. However, marking in some cases does not offer pupils the same high quality guidance as that found in the best examples. Not all teachers check that pupils follow up the advice or extra questions they have written in their books.
- Teachers and other adults in the classroom often work as a team, so that help is given to the pupils who need it. This includes pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs and those who are eligible for the pupil premium. As a result, these pupils make progress at the same rate as their classmates. In an outstanding Year 5 English lesson, pupils knew that help was at hand, but did not rely unduly on adult support: 'It's not always us who get helped'.
- In the best lessons, where the pupils make rapid progress, teachers plan activities which fire pupils' imagination. In an outstanding Year 4 mathematics lesson, the teacher made the nine times tables exciting, and pupils were thrilled by the complex calculations they created. Year 6 pupils delighted in being called mathematicians, as they eagerly explored patterns in numbers.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils, parents and staff have highly positive views about the quality of behaviour in the school. In lessons and at break times, pupils' behaviour seen during the inspection was rarely less than outstanding. The school's records over time confirm pupils' excellent attitudes, with no incidents of pupils not allowed to come to school for a short period because of poor behaviour.
- Pupils are keen to come to school, as shown by their above-average attendance. They enjoy working in groups and willingly listen to each other's ideas, making sure that no-one is left out. Pupils' exceptional teamwork came to the fore in the Year 6 Industry and Enterprise Day, where they used their skills to set up successful businesses, selling their products to pupils and staff.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. They understand how bullying can occur, but are adamant that there is no bullying at the school. They are confident that teachers and other adults at school will help them 'at all times' if they are concerned about anything. Parents agree that their children are safe and well looked after.
- At break times, pupils play safely, making the most of the exercise equipment and games. They enjoy helping to make the school an orderly and happy community. As ambassadors, play leaders or guardian angels helping other pupils, they take their responsibilities seriously. The duty of taking Henry the school dog for a walk is equally prized by the pupils.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides ambitious and determined leadership, inspiring staff to be fully involved in shaping the way forward for the school. A member of staff commented, 'I feel as though my ideas for the school are valued'.

- Through the school plan, there is a strong emphasis on improving teaching. Senior leaders encourage staff to work together to plan lessons and observe each other's teaching, with pupils giving their views on their learning in these lessons. Teachers' own targets for improvement are drawn from the school plan and their promotion is always made dependent on whether they offer good or better teaching.
 - The high-quality training offered by the school is greatly appreciated by teaching and support staff alike. Teachers are given time to visit other schools and research into learning. They have brought back ideas about teaching English and mathematics, which have helped to improve lessons. School leaders use detailed assessment data to make sure that all pupils are making good progress, including pupils eligible for the pupil premium, those with disabilities or special educational needs, and pupils who have arrived at the school after the usual starting-point.
 - The wide range and variety of topics and themes offered by the International Primary Curriculum, which the school has adopted, help pupils gain knowledge and understanding in different subjects, as well developing their skills in English and mathematics. The school makes good use of trips and invitations to visitors to work with pupils, including the 'hands-on history' days, the theatre club and the willow sculptures created in the school grounds. A parent praised the school for the many experiences offered: 'The learning environment that Whitehill continues to create is wonderful'.
 - Pupils' spiritual development is promoted well, such as through the enthusiastic singing in assembly and the high-quality art in pupils' sketchbooks. Pupils showed good understanding of moral issues when learning about Fair Trade in the production of chocolate. They develop good social and cultural understanding through their links with children in Ghana, Canada and the United States.
 - Support from the local authority in this good school has sensibly been 'light touch' for some years. Officers recognise that this is a good school and have provided advice and support designed to allow it to build on its well-established record.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are experienced, and they challenge and support the school well. Through their visits to lessons and meetings with school leaders, governors find out about the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement at first hand. Governors are knowledgeable about the way in which the school organises pupils' learning through the International Primary Curriculum.
 - During discussions with the school about pupil data, governors ask searching questions about how well different groups of pupils are doing. Governors manage finances well, checking whether the pupil premium is helping eligible pupils to make good progress and how this funding is spent.
 - Governors make good use of local authority training to help them keep up to date and always attend the annual conference for governors. They check progress with the school plan regularly, making sure that targets set for senior leaders and teachers link with school's priorities. They expect teachers to be rewarded only where their teaching is good.
 - Through their regular checks, governors make sure that safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.
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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	117253
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	411950

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	214
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Maria Duncan
Headteacher	Frances Bradshaw
Date of previous school inspection	29 April 2009
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