

Highwood Primary School

Mead Way, Bushey, WD23 2AW

Inspection dates 2-3 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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.

- The school has improved significantly under the new leadership. Inspiring leadership from the headteacher, who is well supported by other leaders and governors, has ensured a rise in the standards of achievement over the past year.
- Pupils in key stage 2 have made marked progress in their learning this year and achievement across the school has improved quickly because of the effective actions taken by the school.
- In 2012, standards in English and mathematics at the end of both Year 2 and Year 6 were in line with the national average. Pupils are on track to achieve higher standards in the current year.
- Teaching has improved as a result of rigorous monitoring by the senior leaders and is now good. Pupils' interest and motivation in learning is well supported by good relationships across the school.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are supported very effectively. Consequently, their behaviour improves and as a result they make faster progress.
- Governors use their experience and knowledge to support school development. They are confident in holding leaders to account for the school's performance.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not consistently provide hard enough tasks for all groups of pupils, especially the more able.
- Marking does not always provide clear guidance on how to improve. Where next steps for improvement are given, pupils do not always have the opportunity to act upon this guidance.
- Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to write for different purposes when working in subjects other than English.
- Pupils' handwriting and presentation skills are not developed consistently.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 20 lessons, of which seven were joint lesson observations with either the headteacher or the assistant headteacher. In addition, the inspection team made shorter visits to lessons to focus on specific aspects such as the effectiveness of support for pupils who have special educational needs.
- The inspectors also listened to pupils in Years 2 and 6 read to them.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils, the headteacher, other senior and subject leaders and a local authority representative. The lead inspector met with the Chair and the vice-chair of the governing body.
- The inspectors took account of 79 responses to the Ofsted on-line questionnaire (Parent View). They also analysed 29 responses to the staff questionnaire and spoke with parents during the inspection.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including the school's own information on pupils' current attainment and progress, the school's evaluation of its performance, improvement plans, safeguarding and behaviour policies and records and documentation relating to teachers' performance over time.

Tusha Chakraborti, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Liz Kissane

Additional Inspector

Sa'ad Khaldi

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- A comparatively high proportion of students come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds though the majority, approximately 65%, are White British. About a fifth of the students speak English as an additional language; most are fluent English speakers.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium is average. This is extra government funding given to the school on the basis of the numbers known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after by the local authority or from service families.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is below the national average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs has increased in the current year and is now above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school has specially resourced provision for up to 6 pupils with special educational needs. This resource base is for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. In the past, pupils were taught full time at the base by a team of specialist staff. Since 2012 autumn term, these pupils have been integrated and are now taught in classes alongside their classmates as well as receiving specialist support at the base.
- The school moved to a new building in February 2012 that provides good quality accommodation. The current headteacher and the Chair of the Governing Body joined the school in September 2012. There were significant changes in staffing in the current year. Staffing is now stable.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teaching is at least good and more is outstanding in order to raise achievement in English and mathematics further by:
 - making sure that tasks set in lessons consistently match the learning needs of all groups of pupils and challenge all pupils consistently, especially the more able
 - providing all pupils are given clear guidance on the next steps in their learning, and that they are given time to act upon the guidance
 - giving pupils regular opportunities to practise writing for different purposes in different subjects, to extend the skills they learn in literacy lessons
 - improving pupils' handwriting and presentation skills across the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The majority of children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are typical for their age, although a growing number are now coming in to Reception with language skills that are below that. Children make good progress and, by the end of Reception, many achieve standards that are above average.
- The national test results dipped in 2011 and 2012 and, by the end of Year 6, pupils achieved standards in English and mathematics that were average. The school's data on pupils' progress for the current year and the work seen in their books and lessons show that progress in English and mathematics has greatly improved over the past year and pupils are on track to reach higher standards at the end of Year 6. This is because the current leadership team has been successful in improving the quality of teaching to increase progress across the school, especially in Years 5 and 6.
- Standards in reading are good across the school. Younger pupils apply their knowledge of phonics (linking letters and sounds) to pronounce unfamiliar words and show understanding of the stories they read. The national screening of Year 1 phonics skills scores were well above the national average over the past two years.
- Older pupils review the events and characters from the books they read and write well for different purposes. In guided reading sessions, pupils read confidently and fluently from a range of stories and discuss the key features of different styles of writing. This was evident in a Year 6 session where pupils successfully explored the imaginative use of language in the texts they read and used this knowledge well to analyse how authors use language to make their writing exciting.
- A strong focus on mental mathematics and investigation are helping pupils to acquire good calculation and problem-solving skills across the school. Pupils in Year 5 were observed converting English currency into Canadian dollars to calculate the cost of different products. Pupils are developing a good understanding of how to present information in charts and bar graphs.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because they receive effective support from teachers and teaching assistants. Pupils from the support base spend most of their time in the classrooms, with a short period at the support base each day. They receive very effective support from school staff as well as the specialist teachers from the support base. Consequently, these pupils are making good progress and increasingly closing the gaps in attainment between themselves and other groups of pupils.
- In 2012, Y6 pupils achieved results in the national test which indicated that, on average, they were one term behind their classmates in English and two terms behind them in mathematics. The school's current information shows that this gap has narrowed significantly and those pupils supported by the pupil premium are set to achieve as well as their classmates in both English and mathematics. The additional funding has been spent on extra staff who give carefully planned support to individuals or small groups of pupils to make sure they do not fall behind in their learning. Pupils who are from minority ethnic backgrounds, or speak English as an additional language, also achieve at least as well their classmates do.

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The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good overall, with some that is outstanding and this has ensured faster progress for pupils in all year groups.
- In the Nursery and Reception, children are helped in pursuing activities of their own choice as well as those directed by adults. They enjoy reading and have good opportunities to use and apply their developing literacy skills. This was seen in a library session, where children read the story of 'Pirates', successfully recounting the story and linking it with other activities in class.
- Teachers have good relationships with pupils and provide a positive atmosphere for learning in lessons. Most have good subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. Consequently, pupils respond readily to tasks with interest and enthusiasm.
- The best lessons engage pupils well in learning through effective questioning that successfully builds on what they already know. For example, in a mathematics lesson in year 6, lively discussion and effective questions from the teacher helped pupils to apply their knowledge of mathematical operations to solve some challenging multi-step word problems.
- The teaching of reading is good. Guided reading sessions are used effectively to deepen pupils' understanding of a range of stories. This was seen in a Year 6 lesson where pupils successfully analysed the use of language and its impact on key events and characters.
- The work planned in lessons is usually well matched to the learning needs of all ability groups, and planning includes good use of support from skilful teaching assistants. Nevertheless, opportunities are occasionally missed to extend skills and understanding of all groups of pupils, especially the more able. Consequently, not all pupils achieve as well as they could do.
- Marking is regular but does not always include appropriate guidance on how to improve work. In some cases, although the next steps are suggested, pupils are not given time to respond, so they repeat the same mistakes. Pupils are not consistently encouraged to develop good handwriting and presentation skills.
- Teachers ensure that pupils write for different purposes in English, using imaginative language. Nonetheless, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to extend the writing skills learnt in English lessons through writing in other subjects.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' behaviour is good and has improved significantly since the last inspection. A small minority of pupils caused some disruption in school in the past years. The school has acted swiftly and resolved these issues successfully. The integrated system for supporting pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties in lessons is also having a positive impact on pupils' behaviour. The support base provides these pupils very good support in dealing with their specific emotional needs. Pupils respond very well to the school's positive approach to managing behaviour.
- Pupils are courteous and learn well in lessons without disruption. They collaborate well in groups and when discussing their learning with partners.
- Pupils are well aware of different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying and know what to

do if any should occur. They say that incidents of bullying have reduced significantly over the year and are now rare. They are confident that should any such incidents occur they would be dealt with very effectively by adults. As a result, they feel safe and secure. The large majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire agreed that children behave well and feel happy and safe at school.

- Pupils develop a strong sense of responsibility which is reflected in their commitment to the work of the school council and their roles as play leaders and house captains. They were fully involved in the consultation of the designing the new school building and in deciding about the playground equipment. They raise funds for a range of charities. Attendance has improved as a result of the school's concerted effort to promote good attendance. It is now average.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, despite the changes in staffing, has successfully established a strong leadership team. Leaders are ambitious and are successfully driving improvement. The headteacher has taken decisive and successful action to eradicate weak teaching. Consequently, teaching has improved vastly and standards of achievement have risen over the past year.

Leaders have established a rigorous programme for the monitoring of teaching and staff development through which they develop the expertise of teachers. As a result, teaching has improved and standards are rising. The school's view of its own performance successfully identifies the school's priorities for improvement and has a clear focus on raising achievement further.

- Teachers have clear and challenging annual targets for improvement and fully understand the link between effectiveness and rates of pay. They show high professional integrity and commitment.
- A good range of sporting activities and visits enrich pupils' learning experiences. Effective links between different subjects and events in school extend pupils' knowledge of the world and promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. The 'World Week' programme, as observed during the inspection, provided pupils with good opportunities to learn about geographical, economic and cultural features of different countries. This is further enhanced through the teaching of music and art.
- The local authority has provided very effective support to the school which has helped it improve quickly within a short time. Leaders and governors worked effectively with the local authority to achieve this.

All safeguarding requirements are met fully. Policies and procedures to ensure the safeguarding and welfare of pupils are robust and these are checked regularly.

■ The governance of the school:

- The new Chair, along with other governors, is active in the life and work of the school and is committed to raising achievement. Governors know how the school compares with similar schools and use national information to hold the school to account. They have a clear picture of the effectiveness of teaching and its leadership, and pupils' progress. They set challenging targets for improvement for the headteacher and oversee the management of teachers' performance, including the links between pay and the quality of teaching. Governors have a clear understanding of how the pupil premium funding is spent and its impact on the achievement of those pupils supported by the funding. For example, they are aware that the gap between these pupils and their classmates has narrowed significantly.

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	117089
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	401645

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	453
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Luke Purser
Headteacher	Della Allen
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2009
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