

# Ashurst Primary School

New Glade Hill, off Chain Lane, Blackbrook, St Helens, Merseyside, WA11 9QJ

**Inspection dates** 11–12 July 2013

| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>   | Previous inspection: | Satisfactory                | 3        |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
|                                | This inspection:     | <b>Requires improvement</b> | <b>3</b> |
| Achievement of pupils          |                      | Requires improvement        | 3        |
| Quality of teaching            |                      | Requires improvement        | 3        |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils |                      | Good                        | 2        |
| Leadership and management      |                      | Requires improvement        | 3        |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Achievement is not yet good. The progress pupils make is uneven as they move through the school.
- In mathematics, too few pupils make more than expected progress from their starting points or reach the higher levels of attainment.
- Teaching is not consistently good across the school. The needs of groups of pupils of differing ability are not always sufficiently taken into account in teachers' planning, particularly those of the more able. As a consequence, pupils sometimes find tasks too easy. Less-able pupils are not always given the resources they need to work independently of the teacher and so rely too heavily on direct help from adults.
- Pupils are not always given precise enough guidance about how to improve their work, particularly in writing and spelling.
- Pupils are not given enough opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in subjects other than mathematics.
- Senior leaders are not all fully involved in checking and driving improvement in the quality of teaching. Good practice in the school is therefore not yet spread rapidly enough.
- Governors are not well enough informed to challenge the school as effectively as they might and hold it to account for its performance.

### The school has the following strengths

- The teaching of reading is improving at a good rate. It is well organised and has led to marked improvements in attainment and progress, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. As a result, pupils enjoy reading and read with increasing fluency and understanding.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils have very good relationships with one another and with adults in the school. They have positive attitudes towards their learning and are keen to do well. They feel safe in school. Attendance is above average.
- The headteacher provides clear direction. Since the last inspection, standards in English and mathematics have risen and attendance has improved. These are clear indications of the school's capacity to improve further.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 17 lessons and made short visits to other activities led by teachers and trained assistants. These included three joint lesson observations with the headteacher.
- Inspectors met with two groups of pupils. Discussions were held with staff, including senior leaders and those responsible for leading subjects. Meetings were conducted with the Chair of the Governing Body and with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 32 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), parental surveys completed by the school, and nine questionnaires completed by staff.
- Inspectors analysed pupils' work in books with the senior leadership team and read a range of documents. These included information on the school's own evaluation of its performance, improvement plans, pupils' current progress as well as policies and records on safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.

## Inspection team

Judith Tolley, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Deana Aldred

Additional Inspector

Peter McKay

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Ashurst is an average-sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion speaking English as an additional language is lower than that found nationally.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after by the local authority and children of service families) is higher than average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by school action is lower than average. The proportion supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is higher than average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes in staff.
- The school has a number of awards, and has achieved Healthy School status.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
  - ensuring teachers plan activities that precisely meet the needs of all pupils, particularly to provide an appropriate level of challenge for the more able
  - making sure that less-able pupils are always given the right resources to be able to complete tasks successfully without help from adults
  - ensuring pupils are always given good written guidance so that they know precisely how they can improve their work, particularly their writing and spelling skills
  - making sure teachers give pupils the time they need to think for themselves and opportunities to explain their working or thinking to other pupils
  - providing more opportunities for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage to develop their literacy and numeracy skills when they learn without direct support from adults.
- Raise attainment and increase the rate of progress further in mathematics by providing pupils with more opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in subjects other than mathematics.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management, including governance, on improving pupils' achievement by:
  - ensuring senior leaders are given the time and opportunity to be fully involved in checking and driving improvement in the quality of teaching and to work together with subject leaders so that they spread good practice more quickly across the school
  - making sure governors have a good understanding of the school's performance and the impact of strategies aimed at raising pupils' achievement so that they are better able to hold the school to account and challenge the school to improve further.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- The progress pupils make as they move through the school is uneven, particularly in mathematics, and requires improvement.
- Standards in mathematics are below average by the end of Year 6. However, achievement in mathematics is improving steadily. Standards are now higher than the significantly below average standards reported in Year 6 in 2012. This is because more pupils are now reaching the higher levels of attainment than previously. Although most make the expected rate of progress, the proportion of pupils making better than expected progress from their individual starting points is still lower than nationally.
- Over the last three years, standards in English have risen and pupils' progress is now speeding up, particularly in reading. Previous gaps in the performances between boys and girls in English have closed. By the end of Year 6, standards in English are broadly average.
- Pupils now make good progress in developing their reading skills. The youngest are able to apply their knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) successfully to read simple sentences. From the outset, they read with interest and clearly enjoy their reading so that by the end of Year 6, most now read a variety of texts with a good level of fluency and understanding. Most are able to talk in detail about what they have read, empathise with characters in stories, make inferences and read for information.
- Many pupils enter the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge that are below, and some well below, those typically expected for their age. Children make good progress in some aspects of their learning, such as communication, language, reading and writing. Overall, however, they make expected progress. The majority enter Year 1 with skills that are below those expected for their age.
- Pupils with special educational needs are making the same expected progress as their peers as the result of the extra help with English and mathematics and one-to-one support in lessons, which enables them to be fully involved.
- In 2012, pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium funding, including those eligible for free school meals, made slower progress than their peers and the gap in their performance widened. Work seen during the inspection and the school's analysis of progress indicate that the extra support that the school is providing with this funding now enables these pupils to reach their targets and to make the same expected progress as their peers. Gaps between the performances of different groups, including those receiving this funding, are now closing.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Teaching is too variable across the school. The quality of teaching over time requires improvement. Although good practice was observed, evidence from the school's own records, analysis of pupils' work and from joint observations made by inspectors and school leaders shows that the quality of teaching is not consistently good or better. Pupils' progress, as they move through the school, is, therefore, uneven.
- In some lessons, pupils' progress is slowed because planning does not take enough account of their varying individual needs. In particular, the level of challenge provided for the more-able pupils is not great enough to enable them to achieve their full potential. Less-able pupils sometimes rely too heavily upon direct help from the teacher or teaching assistants to tackle tasks confidently on their own.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly and there are instances of good practice within the school. However, marking is variable between the classes. It does not always give pupils the precise guidance they need to improve, particularly in their writing. Marking does not always pick up errors in spelling so pupils continue to make the same mistakes. Not all pupils respond to teachers' comments and improve upon the work they have done.

- Pupils respond well to opportunities to work together with enthusiasm, especially when tasks involve problem solving. For instance, in a Year 2 mathematics lesson, pupils rapidly identified acute and obtuse angles and as a result of discussion with a partner, worked out how to use a protractor to measure these angles accurately. However, this approach is not seen often enough and many pupils spend too much time checking their progress in mathematics through working on their own on interactive computer-based programs rather than applying their mathematics to problem solving.
- In the Nursery and Reception classes, teachers make effective use of assessments about what children know and can do to plan their next steps in learning. In activities led by adults, children make good progress. However, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for children to further develop their literacy and numeracy skills at a good rate when they learn through independent play.
- In Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils are sometimes prevented from thinking things through for themselves and taking the initiative to show they can learn on their own. This is because teachers are sometimes too ready to provide the answers for them. Pupils are not always given the opportunity to explain their working or their thinking to others.
- Arrangements for the teaching of early reading have improved and now meet the needs of groups of differing ability well. This is having a positive impact upon pupils' achievement.
- Some teaching is good. This is where pupils increase in confidence and independence as a result of skilful questioning which challenges them to solve problems for themselves. In a Year 6 geography lesson, for instance, pupils were keen to explain what they had found out about tectonic plates because they had been given the opportunity to do their own research into the subject. As a result of effective questioning and the clear presentation of the facts using the interactive whiteboard, they were able to begin to explain the geology of volcanoes.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- Pupils' behaviour around the school is good. Pupils are polite, courteous, and keen to talk about their school and how much they enjoy it. In the playground they play well together, take good care of equipment and use their initiative to organise activities at lunchtimes.
- Pupils and parents say they feel safe and they value the good relationships they have with their teachers and with one another.
- In lessons, pupils are keen to learn and to do well. When working with a partner, they work together sensibly, organise themselves well and help each other. They take on responsibility, for example, as playground leaders and helpers, with enthusiasm. They regularly help younger pupils in the playground and organise games.
- Pupils have a good understanding and awareness of different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying. Although a very small number of parents express concern about poor behaviour, pupils are confident that any poor behaviour is usually dealt with promptly and effectively.
- Attendance has improved year on year and is now above average. This is because of the actions the school is taking in encouraging attendance and working with those families whose children do not attend regularly enough.
- Pupils understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and speak enthusiastically about opportunities to take part in sports and other extra-curricular activities.

### **The leadership and management** require improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because senior leaders are not yet fully involved in checking and driving improvement in the quality of teaching across the school. They are not given enough time or opportunity to work together with subject leaders as a cohesive team. This means that best practice is not shared quickly enough to ensure that teaching is consistently good across the school.

- The senior leadership team has an accurate view of the school's performance because leaders track pupils' progress against their targets accurately and carefully. They know what needs to be done to secure further improvement.
- Despite changes in staff, the headteacher has been successful in maintaining stability and in improving achievement, particularly in English. He has acted decisively to eradicate inadequate teaching and to improve management systems, including governance, within the school. The school, therefore, has the capacity to improve further.
- The quality of teaching of all members of staff is regularly reviewed. The outcomes are used to secure appropriate training to benefit their professional development, as well as to consider any advancement in pay. The information gathered from observing lessons is used to identify training needs.
- The curriculum adequately provides for pupils to learn all required subjects. It is enriched by a variety of activities, wide range of clubs, sporting activities, visits and visitors to extend learning beyond normal lessons. The school's links with other schools as well as visits and visitors are now used effectively to increase pupils' understanding of cultures other than their own.
- Recent improvements to the curriculum, particularly for reading, are having a positive impact on improving pupils' skills at a better rate. Good provision is made for pupils to develop their information and communication technology skills. However, further curriculum improvements are required to ensure that pupils of varying abilities make good progress and to ensure pupils have more opportunities to practise their mathematical skills in other curriculum subjects.
- The local authority provides effective support, such as in developing the roles of subject leaders and in improving pupils' achievement in English and mathematics.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors are very supportive of the school; they have an adequate understanding of how the school is doing and what it needs to do to improve further. They make sure that pupils and staff are safe by securing effective safeguarding arrangements. Governors understand how the pupil premium funding is spent. They make sure that some of the grant is used to pay for extra staffing to improve the eligible pupils' achievement in English and mathematics but do not have an accurate view of its impact upon pupils' achievement. Governors are involved in monitoring the performance of the headteacher and setting him relevant targets and they are also aware of the performance of teaching staff. Finances are managed with care and the budget is closely controlled. As yet, the governing body does not play an active enough role in reviewing the school's performance and contributing to the improvement planning processes. Governors require further training so that they have a better understanding of how to interpret the school's performance data in order to hold the school to account fully effectively.

## 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

|                                |           |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b> | 104771    |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | St Helens |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 400737    |

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

|  |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>                      | Primary                 |
| <b>School category</b>                     | Community               |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                 | 3–11                    |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                    | Mixed                   |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b> | 253                     |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>               | The governing body      |
| <b>Chair</b>                               | Ian Bowling             |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                         | Brian Banks             |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>  | 20 October 2009         |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                    | 01744 678150            |
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