

# Watling Lower School

Bull Pond Lane, Dunstable, LU6 3BJ

**Inspection dates** 26–27 September 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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

- Teaching is not consistently good enough to ensure that pupils across the school make good progress year on year in English and mathematics
- Progress is slower in Years 3 and 4 than elsewhere.
- Teachers do not always have high enough expectations of what pupils can learn. They do not consistently set tasks at the right level for all pupils, especially the more able.
- The comments teachers write on pupils' work do not always help pupils to improve it. Teachers do not always check to see that pupils act on the advice they are given.
- Pupils have insufficient opportunities to improve their writing and calculating skills in different subjects.
- Teachers are not doing enough to help pupils to develop good handwriting, grammar and presentation skills.
- After a period of instability, records of progress have not been dependable. Leaders are not all using data well to analyse how good teaching is and what needs to improve

### The school has the following strengths

- Children make good progress in the Reception classes.
- Pupils often make good progress in learning to read.
- With support from the local authority, leaders and governors have successfully resolved a large budget deficit. They have ensured that the school building is now fit to provide a good quality education for all pupils.
- The headteacher knows what needs to be done and has improved teaching.
- Pupils are courteous, considerate and relate well to others. They feel safe. They develop a good understanding of the cultural diversity within the school and value others' beliefs and ways of life.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 13 lessons, two of which were seen together with the 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 and those who are eligible for the pupil premium. The inspectors also listened to groups of pupils in Years 2 and 4 reading.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders and a local authority representative. The lead inspector met with a group of governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body.
- A member of the inspection team held a meeting with a group of pupils from Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Inspectors took account of 23 responses to the online questionnaire for parents and carers, Parent View. They also analysed 19 questionnaire returns from staff.
- The inspection team looked at a range of documentation, including information on pupils' performance, the school's own analysis of its strengths and weaknesses, improvement plans, safeguarding and behaviour policies, and records and documents relating to the targets set for teachers to improve their work.

## Inspection team

Tusharkana Chakraborti, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Vreta Bagilhole	Additional Inspector
David Gutmann	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage and a higher than average proportion of pupils comes from minority ethnic backgrounds. A very few are at the early stages of speaking English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides funding for children in the care of the local authority and for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion receiving support at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school has been through a very turbulent period since the last inspection. It experienced serious financial debts, which resulted in interim leadership, several staff changes and poor condition of the school building. The budget issues are now resolved. An extensive building programme to extend the school's useable space has now been completed.
- A Chair of Governors was appointed in June 2011 by the local authority, when almost all governors were new. A new Chair was appointed in September 2013. The current headteacher joined the school as an interim head in September 2011 and started in the substantive post in September 2012.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good across the school by:
  - making sure that all tasks set in lessons take into account what pupils can already do and challenge all pupils consistently
  - making sure that all pupils are given clear guidance on the next steps in their learning, and that they act upon it
  - increasing the depth of pupils' understanding through effective questioning and through time to apply knowledge and to work on tasks independently
  - ensuring that when the class is being taught together, teaching assistants are always used effectively to speed up learning.
- Speed up pupils' progress in Key Stage 2 in mathematics and across the school in writing by:
  - extending the opportunities for pupils to apply their writing and numeracy skills in all subjects
  - giving close attention to improving pupils' handwriting, punctuation and presentation skills in all year groups.
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - ensuring assessments of teaching quality give enough attention to the learning that results
  - ensuring that all leaders receive appropriate training and support in the interpretation of data to chart pupils' progress and identify what needs to improve.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement requires improvement in Key Stage 2. Children enter the school with skills that are often below expectations. Attainment is average by the time they leave at the end of Year 4, but the rapid learning takes place in Reception. Pupils make faster progress in Reception and Key Stage 1 than in Key Stage 2.
- Across key stages 1 and 2, progress in writing is slower than that in reading and mathematics as pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to write for different purposes. Teachers do not always give enough attention to promoting pupils' handwriting, punctuation and presentation skills to ensure work is of a high quality in pupils' books.
- Children make good progress in the Reception classes because staff have a good understanding of children's needs and plan a wide range of activities that enthuse and engage them well in their learning. Consequently, standards are broadly average by the end of Reception Year.
- Pupils learn to read effectively. Results of the Year 1 check on how well pupils link letters and sounds (phonics) were above average in 2012, and were similarly positive in 2013. During the inspection, younger pupils showed they can use their knowledge of phonics to read unfamiliar words. Pupils enjoy reading. Older pupils are gaining an increasing understanding of different styles of writing and are keen to discuss their favourite characters.
- Progress in writing and mathematics is slower in Years 3 and 4 because information about what pupils already know how to do is not always used effectively to set tasks at the right level. This slows the progress of pupils of all abilities, but particularly the more able.
- There are no significant differences between the achievements of different ethnic groups. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make similar progress and achieve standards comparable to that of their classmates.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs, including those with specific social and emotional needs, make similar progress to others.
- The support for pupils eligible for the pupil premium has improved over the past year because sufficient space is now available to help pupils on an individual basis outside the classroom, as a result of improvements made to the school building. Consequently, some of these pupils have made faster progress in reading, writing and mathematics, narrowing the gap in attainment between them and their classmates. In Year 4, the gap narrowed from four terms for pupils who left in 2012 to less than one term for those leaving in 2013. In Year 2, on average, pupils were one term behind the others in both 2012 and 2013.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it does not ensure that pupils' achieve well over time and that they rapidly acquire all the key skills in literacy and numeracy. Pupils have limited opportunities to extend their writing and numeracy skills in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Teachers do not always have sufficiently high expectations of how much progress pupils can

make in lessons. In some lessons teachers tend to keep the whole class together doing the same tasks for too long. These tasks are sometimes too easy for some or too hard for others and opportunities are missed to challenge and move pupils on quickly to the next level. In some lessons there is little time left for pupils to deepen their understanding by using or applying their new knowledge, working without the teacher, so learning stalls.

- There is a positive climate for learning in lessons and pupils respond readily to tasks, showing interest and enthusiasm. Relationships are good and behaviour is managed well in all classes.
- Marking does not consistently provide guidance about how to improve. Where guidance is provided, teachers do not ensure that pupils are given time to act upon the guidance and so pupils do not always respond to it. In some classes the feedback that teachers give is good and pupils respond positively to their teachers' comments.
- In the better lessons, teachers display good subject knowledge and they engage pupils in learning through effective questioning that successfully builds on what they already know. In a good science lesson in Year 4, the teacher engaged pupils through effective questioning to make sure that they learnt to conduct a fair test to investigate the properties of different materials. Where questioning is weaker, teachers do not probe answers to check understanding, so again learning sometimes lacks depth.
- Teaching in Reception classes is effective because children are helped in pursuing activities of their own choice as well as those directed by adults. Outdoor activities are used effectively to consolidate learning in all areas.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are supported increasingly well in one-to-one and small-group sessions by the teaching assistants. This is not always the case in lessons. For example when pupils are all together listening to the teacher, the teaching assistants are sometimes not used effectively to help pupils to learn faster.

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

- Pupils behave well in lessons. They try hard and usually concentrate well, even when lesson activities are not fully challenging. When given the opportunity they collaborate well in groups and when discussing their learning with partners.
- Pupils respond well to the school's inclusive ethos and its positive behaviour programme. This contributes well to a calm and safe environment where pupils flourish. In a mixed class of Years 1 and 2, pupils were observed discussing the school's code of conduct and they worked well collaboratively to write a song reflecting their class rules. In the Reception classes, children follow instructions willingly and are learning the importance of taking turns and considering others.
- Pupils feel safe at school. They have a good understanding of how to stay safe, including when using the internet or on the road and in case of fire. They have a good understanding and consider the safety of others because the school includes issues about safety in lessons and work with parents. Almost all parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire agreed that their children are safe at school.
- Pupils show a good understanding of different forms of bullying, including name-calling, racism and cyber bullying. They say that there is very little bullying in the school. They are confident

that if it did occur, it would be dealt with quickly and fairly.

- The pupils take on responsibilities enthusiastically. Through the school council, pupils select charities for which they raise funds. Attendance is average.

### **The leadership and management requires improvement**

- Leaders and governors, supported by the local authority, have steered the school out of the turbulent period caused by serious financial difficulty and changing staffing. They have successfully established systems which are helping the school to operate more efficiently. Nevertheless, the use of data to analyse how well pupils are making progress requires improvement.
  - The senior managers have limited data from the period prior to the headteacher's arrival and limited evidence that assessments made in the past have all been secure. More recently standards have been assessed and recorded correctly. However, this means there is only relatively limited tracking of pupils' progress prior to 2013.
  - Subject leaders, some of whom are new, have had little training or experience in the analysis of data, and do not as a matter of course use it to identify what needs to improve. Records show that some lesson observations have focused too much on teaching techniques rather than the impact of teaching on pupils' learning.
  - Staff changes have led to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, which have, in turn, affected pupils' achievement adversely. However, the appointment of the current headteacher in her permanent position has brought improved stability to the senior leadership team. Whilst changes of staff have limited improvements to teaching as a whole, leaders have successfully improved the quality of teaching of some longer-serving teachers. Together with accurate self-evaluation, this demonstrates that the school has the capacity for continued improvement.
  - The headteacher has now set teachers demanding targets, linked closely to the attainment and progress of pupils in the class that they teach. Teachers understand the link between their performance and rates of pay.
  - The curriculum is enhanced by a range of clubs and visits to places of interest. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through assemblies, religious studies and class discussions on school values and its code of conduct. The school has appointed extra staff to develop sporting skills further, using the new primary school sport funding, but it is too early to assess the impact.
  - The local authority has provided very effective support to the school through a designated school improvement officer who worked closely with the new governors and the headteacher. It has also fully funded the cost of major refurbishment of the school building, which fell into a bad state of repair because of the school's financial constraint.
- **The governance of the school:**
- Almost all governors are relatively new. The governors have received appropriate training and are well aware of the difficulties that the school faces. The previous Chair, along with other governors, the local authority and the leaders, worked effectively, over the past year to bring the school out the huge deficit in budget and to improve the work of governors. The governing body is now involved well in all aspects of the school's work. They challenge leaders and ask searching questions about how any underperformance is tackled. Governors are

aware of the results pupils attain in national tests and how they compare nationally. They set challenging objectives for the headteacher and understand how each member of staff is paid according to their experience and performance. Governors are fully aware how the funding for the pupil premium has been used to raise attainment of the targeted pupils. The governing body ensures that all statutory requirements for safeguarding are met.

## 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>	109499
<b>Local authority</b>	Central Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	429499

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

<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	171
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Andrew Whaymann
<b>Headteacher</b>	Susan Penglase
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	5 March 2009
<b>Telephone number</b>	01582 662232
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