

Peartree Primary School

Peartree Lane, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 3XW

Inspection dates

3–4 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
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

- Pupils' progress in English and mathematics varies too much in different age groups, and is slowest in Years 1 and 2.
- Achievement in reading is held back by some weaknesses in the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make), particularly for the younger pupils in Years 1 and 2.
- Teachers do not always use information about how well pupils are learning to plan activities that match their abilities. As a result pupils, particularly the most able, are not always challenged to reach higher levels in their work.
- Teachers' marking and feedback are not giving pupils precise information about how to improve their work, and they do not give pupils enough time to respond to and learn from their comments.
- Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching do not always result in improvements because the feedback given to teachers is not rigorous enough.
- Leaders do not ensure that school policies such as the marking policy are applied consistently by all staff.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have focused successfully on improving standards in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6, which have improved a lot over the last two years.
- All pupils now make or exceed nationally expected progress between Years 2 and 6 in mathematics and particularly in English.
- Children make good progress in the Reception class as a result of teaching that takes account of their fascinations and interests to help them learn.
- Pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium are now making better progress because of the good support they are given.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They feel safe, get on well with each other and enjoy school.
- Governors hold the school to account well for its actions and have a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons, three of which were seen together with the headteacher. In addition, inspectors made other short visits to lessons and to learning areas in the course of their observations of pupils' behaviour. They also listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors observed senior leaders reporting back to teachers on the quality of their teaching.
- Inspectors took account of the 10 responses to the online Parent View survey, considered the response to the school's own survey of parents, and spoke informally to parents and carers as they collected pupils from the school.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils, representatives from the local authority, governors, senior and subject leaders, and teaching staff.
- The information from 10 staff questionnaires was considered.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school, and looked at pupils' books and the school's own data and monitoring of how well pupils make progress. They also checked planning documents, records of checks on the quality of teaching, and records of behaviour, attendance and punctuality, as well as documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Simon Blackburn, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Stephen Hall

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is double the national average.
- Almost a third of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds. A quarter of pupils are believed to speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above the national average, as is the proportion supported at school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- A much larger proportion of pupils join or leave during the school year than in most other primary schools.
- The school runs a breakfast club at the beginning of the day.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to raise achievement, particularly in Key Stage 1 and for the most able pupils in Key Stage 2, by ensuring that teachers:
 - always use information on how well pupils are learning to plan and then adapt activities that closely match their abilities and needs, and challenge their thinking and understanding
 - consistently give pupils feedback about their work that is precise about what needs to be improved
 - give pupils regular opportunities to respond to their marking and feedback, and check that the improvements have been made.
- Improve pupils' reading abilities in using letters and sounds in Years 1 and 2 by ensuring that phonics lessons are planned to develop each pupil's skills at the right level.
- Increase the impact of leaders at all levels on pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring that feedback given to teachers after checks on the quality of teaching identifies specific elements of their practice that should be improved
 - checking that teachers are matching work to pupils' different levels of ability
 - securing greater consistency in the quality of support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs so that it is equally effective in all year groups
 - checking that whole-school policies like the marking policy are implemented in the same way by all teachers.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils' progress varies too much as they move through the school to sustain good achievement. It is good in Reception but slows in Years 1 and 2, and does not accelerate again until Years 4 and 5. The most able pupils do not make as much progress as they could because the work they are asked to complete does not challenge them enough, particularly in mathematics.
- The standards reached by the end of Key Stage 2 have improved over the last two years. In 2013, the proportion of pupils reaching the nationally expected Level 4 in both English and mathematics was above average for the first time. Attainment in reading and mathematics was stronger than in writing, and no pupils reached Level 5 in both English and mathematics.
- School data show that all the pupils who finished Year 6 in 2013 had made the expected two levels of progress from Year 2 in English and mathematics. A larger proportion than seen nationally made more than expected progress in English, although in mathematics the proportion was below the national average.
- Pupils reach broadly average levels in reading by the time they reach Year 6 and read texts with confidence and expression. Younger pupils are also confident to read aloud but lack fluency in their reading because, while confident with long vowel sounds and whole word recognition, they are not confident in using techniques such as sounding out and blending sounds together. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been well below national averages.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs do well in Year 6 but make less progress than other pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5. The quality of extra support given to these pupils is variable across the school, and some teaching assistants do not challenge them enough.
- Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who are believed to be learning English as an additional language get the support they need to make similar progress to other pupils.
- Pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium are now making better progress. As a result, the gap between their attainment in English and mathematics and that of the other pupils, which had widened in the 2012 Year 6 tests, closed again in 2013. The funding is used to provide one-to-one and small group tuition, as well as supporting their personal and social development by making sure they can take part in all activities.
- Children begin school with skills that are mostly below, and in some cases well below, typical levels for their age. In Reception, teachers and support staff make learning fun and make every effort to follow the interests of the children with stimulating activities. As a result, children quickly develop their skills in writing and reading and so make good progress.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching varies too much across the school and pupils make different amounts of progress as a result. Inspectors saw much good teaching but there are still too many lessons in which the match of work to pupils' abilities lacks enough precision and challenge. In a number of classes the same task was given to all pupils, so the most able were not stretched and other pupils struggled to start tasks.

- Marking is carried out frequently and regularly by all teachers, but there is no consistency to the way feedback is given to pupils. Too often, the comments teachers write do not give really specific information about how the work seen can be improved. Some teachers give pupils time to respond to their comments so that they can learn how to improve immediately, but this is not the case in enough classes.
- The teaching of letters and sounds requires improvement because phonics lessons do not take enough account of each pupil's previous learning. Teaching in these sessions is generally well paced, but pupils who have clearly mastered some skills are held back in their progress by going over old ground with the rest of the group.
- In the best lessons seen, teachers asked questions skilfully to make sure pupils understood what they were learning and to make them think more deeply about the work. In a Year 3 phonics lesson, the teacher asked questions of groups of pupils to work out how well things were going and then decided to help some of the pupils by recapping on the rules of the activity. As a result, the pupils then understood exactly what they were looking for when extending verbs.
- Teachers consistently use problem-solving contexts to challenge pupils to use their previously learned skills. The use of shopping scenarios or other real-life situations make the learning relevant and pupils enjoy the demands of thinking about what they have learned in new ways.
- Teachers and other adults skilfully assess the progress of children in the Reception class and make sure that parents and carers are kept informed of the stage their child is at and how best to help them at home.
- When teachers are clear about what they want pupils to learn and share this with them through easily understood success criteria, they make good progress. This was seen in a number of lessons and in these classes pupils were highly motivated and fully engaged in their work. Where teachers were less clear and the pace slowed, pupils occasionally lost concentration.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is good because they have clear rules to follow, relationships are good, and pupils take responsibility for their own and others' behaviour. Pupils say bullying of any kind is rare and is very quickly resolved when it happens. They have a good understanding of the different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying and know how to keep themselves safe.
- Pupils are welcoming and polite and show kindness, respect and compassion for each other. They have very good attitudes to learning and enjoy school. Assemblies and opportunities in lessons ensure that pupils have a good sense of right and wrong and the diverse backgrounds that pupils come from are celebrated, ensuring a cohesive school community.
- There have been no exclusions from the school for a number of years and it is successfully reducing absence, although it remains above the national average. The school experiences a high turnover of pupils during the academic year due to the nature of the communities it serves, but the headteacher and other staff have worked hard with parents to ensure that coming to school is a high priority for all families.
- The breakfast club provides a calm, cheerful start to the day in a safe, friendly, family atmosphere. Many pupils who attend the breakfast club also participate in the excellent choir, which contributes strongly to pupils' sense of community and well-being.

- Parents who responded to the Parent View questionnaire and those who spoke to inspectors as they collected their children are confident that the school keeps their children safe and appreciate the high levels of support their children receive from staff.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Some weaker areas of teaching, such as the way in which work is matched to individual pupils' needs, are not checked closely enough by senior leaders. The headteacher makes regular checks on the quality of teaching through lesson observations and checks on books but the feedback given to teachers as a result does not focus rigorously enough on how aspects of teaching can be improved to ensure that pupils make good or better progress.
- Leaders at all levels do not systematically check that whole-school policies are implemented in the same way by all teachers. This leads to wide variability in practice across the school and missed opportunities to help pupils make faster progress.
- The actions taken by the headteacher and governing body over recent years have been successful in improving pupils' education in Key Stage 2 so that all pupils now make at least expected progress in English and mathematics.
- The headteacher, supported by the governing body, is working with a teaching school in order to raise expectations and to improve teaching and support in all areas of the school. The collaboration is at an early stage but the whole staff have already undertaken some training at the teaching school which is beginning to have an impact on the quality of teaching.
- Some changes in staffing in Year 1 have made it difficult for leaders to improve the quality of teaching for these classes. There is now more stability here and the teaching observed during the inspection show signs of having a good impact on achievement.
- The leadership of the school has been structured to ensure that governors and all sections of the staff have a direct input into strategic decisions that have an impact on pupils' achievement. Two governors and a member of the support staff are part of the senior management team that considers self-evaluation information and sets the priorities for action plans. As a result, plans are well focused and address the main issues for the school, with clear success criteria and timescales by which success can be measured.
- The 'creative curriculum' is well established in the school and uses the enthusiasms and interests of the pupils as the starting point for topics of study. Visits and speakers are frequent components of pupils' learning, adding relevance and extending pupils' knowledge of the world while enhancing their social and cultural development.
- The school uses the additional primary school sports funding to increase the number of pupils taking part in after-school sports by employing specialist coaches. They and specialist teachers from a local secondary school also train teachers and other staff, improving their physical education teaching skills.
- The local authority has provided useful guidance and support for improvements in the teaching of mathematics.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has a good understanding of the strengths of the school as well as the

areas that require further development. Through the innovative leadership structure, governors have a direct input to self-evaluation and action planning which ensures they are fully aware of developments and their impact. Governors have a good understanding of the use of data to monitor progress and are proud of the improvements that have been made in Key Stage 2 as a result of the hard work of the headteacher and her staff. They are aware of the quality of teaching and how staff performance is managed, and recognises the importance of the link between teachers' pay and improving pupils' progress. They are aware of the successful impact that the pupil premium has had on the attainment of eligible pupils because they are also directly involved in providing some of the support that has made the improvements possible. Governors manage the school budget well, and make sure the arrangements for safeguarding meet national requirements.

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	117172
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	425249

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	170
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Brewis
Headteacher	Sherie Hart
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2011
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