

Alumwell Junior School

Primley Avenue, Walsall, WS2 9UP

Inspection dates 2–3 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- All groups of pupils achieve well. Progress in reading is particularly strong because reading skills are well taught. Pupils recognise it is one of the major keys to success in school and later life and work hard to improve their attainment.
- Teachers usually plan effectively to meet the needs of all groups of pupils. In most lessons, they secure pupils' willing participation by making very effective use of spokespersons to help them lead and feed back on pupils' learning.
- Teachers manage pupils well and their ready words of praise encourage pupils to try their best.
- Leaders promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well and provide pupils with carefully chosen opportunities to demonstrate responsibility and to develop teamwork skills.
- Pupils enjoy school, behave well and know how to stay safe. Relationships are strong and the school is a very harmonious community.
- Leaders and governors check pupils' progress carefully. They have taken effective actions to maintain pupils' good achievement since the previous inspection.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Leaders have not yet secured outstanding teaching throughout the school.
- Teachers sometimes miss opportunities to enable pupils to develop their writing skills fully.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 20 lessons taught by 18 teachers and teaching assistants. Three of these lessons were observed together with senior leaders. Samples of pupils' work in writing from the previous school year were analysed. An inspector talked to a few pupils from Year 6 about their favourite books and listened to them reading.
- Meetings were held with school staff, a group of pupils, five governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 10 questionnaires completed by staff. There were insufficient responses from parents and carers to the online questionnaire for these to be recorded on Parent View. An inspector spoke to a few parents and carers on the school playground at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors looked at a range of evidence including: the work in pupils' books; monitoring records; improvement plans; the school's own data on pupils' attainment and progress; consultants' reports; and policies, procedures and records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Derek Aitken, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jean Whalley

Additional Inspector

Jan Bird

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than most primary schools.
- While one quarter of pupils are of White British origin, most pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, principally Pakistani. A very few pupils are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language.
- Almost 50% of pupils, a well-above average proportion, are supported by the pupil premium. In this school, this extra government funding is currently received for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils in the care of the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below average.
- The headteacher is a designated Local Leader of Education (LLE). Together with the school's other senior leaders he has been seconded in a part-time capacity by the local authority to provide short-term support to another local primary school.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- Pupils may attend before- and after-school clubs hosted at the school's feeder infant school. These clubs are not managed by the school's governing bodies and are inspected separately.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make more teaching outstanding and help pupils to make faster progress by:
 - ensuring teachers plan consistently well to meet the needs of all groups of pupils, especially the more able, and recognise quickly when pupils can be moved on to more difficult work
 - ensuring all teachers spread their questioning across the whole class to maintain pupils' full participation throughout lessons
 - ensuring leaders make better use of lesson observations to pinpoint ways in which teachers can improve their practice and to tailor training sharply to meet their individual needs
 - providing teachers with more opportunities to profit from the best practice in the school.
- Improve achievement in writing by:
 - ensuring that pupils have enough opportunities to add depth to their work in one type of writing before moving on to the next one.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the start of Year 3 is below average. However, very few pupils in recent Year 6 groups were working at the higher Level 3 in writing when they joined the school.
- Attainment by the end of Year 6 has been above average in the last two years in reading, average in mathematics, and below average in writing.
- Across the school all groups of pupils, including those pupils of White British and Pakistani backgrounds, make equally good progress. The very few pupils, commonly from Eastern Europe and at an early stage of learning English, settle in quickly and also do well.
- In 2012, the attainment of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium was lower than that of other pupils in the year group, being about two terms behind in English and mathematics. However, from their starting points, these pupils made broadly similar progress to that of other pupils in both subjects. This gap in attainment is closing steadily for pupils in all year groups, including Year 6.
- Most disabled pupils and those pupils with special educational needs make good progress. This is because of recent improvements in staffing, the tracking of their progress and 'catch-up' programmes.
- A well-above average proportion of pupils in 2012 met or exceeded the progress expected of them in reading. Provisional results for the 2013 national tests show that pupils' excellent achievement in this skill is being maintained, while pupils continued to make good progress in mathematics.
- Pupils value reading highly. They are convinced that the ability to read well is the key to success in future education or employment. This motivates less-able pupils to try their best to master texts at one level of difficulty before moving up to the next, more challenging one. More-able pupils very much enjoy working out the meaning and uses of abstract or descriptive vocabulary and answer questions on their reading texts confidently and accurately.
- While the percentage of pupils attaining the nationally expected Level 4 in writing has risen steadily in the last few years, very few pupils attain the higher Level 5. Although most pupils across the school are now making good progress in this skill, continual switching between different types of writing makes it hard for pupils to practise writing in depth and to make best use of the improvements suggested in teachers' marking.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good, and in a few lessons it is outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers match tasks to pupils' abilities very well and make well-judged use of paired partner routines and new technology to make learning exciting and challenging for pupils. They manage pupils expertly and question them closely to enable them to identify the steps they need to take to succeed in their learning. They provide more-able pupils with suitable extra work to extend their learning.
- Teachers promote pupils' self-esteem and effective learning skilfully. They praise and reward pupils wisely to encourage them to try hard and to surmount challenges. They make clever use of pupils as co-leaders and summarisers of learning. These spokespersons rarely disappoint their teachers' expectations and their thoughtful contributions encourage their classmates to concentrate hard and 'to have a go' when it is their turn.
- Teachers have strong expectations for pupils' progress in reading and teach them the appropriate skills very well. They plan guided reading lessons carefully and their well-judged use of resources ensures that all groups of pupils develop their skills at a fast pace.
- Mathematics and other subjects, such as French, are mainly taught well. For example, in a good Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils discussed systematic approaches for identifying factors before

applying their new knowledge accurately to identifying prime numbers. Teachers' competent command of French pronunciation helps pupils develop the confidence to apply new words in short sentences.

- Teaching assistants usually work well with pupils who require additional help well in lessons. Support is more consistently effective in small, targeted withdrawal groups, for example, those designed to improve boys' writing.
- Marking is usually of a good standard in English and mathematics, and gives pupils clear information about how they can improve their work.
- On some occasions the pace of learning drops. Although teachers check pupils' prior learning effectively, they do not always plan sharply to meet the needs of all groups of pupils, especially the more able, and do not recognise quickly when individuals or small groups of pupils have mastered a task or idea and can be moved on to other, more difficult work. Sometimes, teachers do not spread their questioning well enough across the whole class to ensure that all pupils stay alert and are fully involved in the lesson.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils report that they like coming to school because teachers make lessons interesting, everyone gets on well with each other and there is always lots to do. Break times demonstrate their enjoyment of school life perfectly. The playground is a hive of activity where pupils organise and take part in a large number of ball games, tackle the challenges of the trim-trail enthusiastically and have great fun chasing each other or scuffing through fallen leaves – all this under the watchful eye of the safety patrol captain and crew.
- Pupils also behave sensibly in public areas inside school. Pupils of different backgrounds mix with each other very well. They are polite and friendly towards each other, and listen to and respect each other's views.
- Behaviour in lessons is nearly always good and is, on a few occasions, exemplary. Pupils are responsive to their teachers' ready encouragement, concentrate well and persevere. Their positive attitudes support their good progress, although, on a few occasions, when teachers do not involve them fully in questioning, the pupils affected are passive onlookers.
- There were no exclusions last year and pupils have few concerns about behaviour. They say that bullying rarely occurs and believe that they are well equipped to deal with any disrespectful behaviour and know how stay safe, for example, through lessons on e-safety.
- The school promotes pupils' sense of a shared purpose and enterprise skills in the school, local and wider community very well. For their part, pupils know that their views and contributions matter, for example, through opportunities to be 'headteacher for the day'. Pupils from Year 4 start the day off with a radio broadcast, while able Year 5 mathematicians man the tuck shop at break times.
- Pupils value their many, varied opportunities, for example, as school councillors, playground leaders and house captains to help them develop a mature sense of responsibility and useful teamwork skills.
- Punctuality has improved and pupils' attendance rose to average last year.

The leadership and management are good

- The school knows itself well, understands what its main priorities are and targets resources sensibly to tackle areas of weakness. School self-evaluation, including that undertaken by middle leaders, is mainly accurate.
- Pupils' progress is checked effectively. The information collected is used well to eliminate potential discrimination and to ensure pupils reach suitably challenging targets. Leaders, for example, have taken a series of well-chosen steps, such as whole-staff training and individual pupil feedback sessions, to improve pupils' progress in writing. A number of useful actions have

been implemented to improve support for disabled pupils, those pupils with special educational needs and other pupils who need additional support to enable them to keep up with their classmates.

- The school maintains a register of able and talented pupils and provides a good variety of enrichment for these pupils through clubs, visits and a network of partnerships, including links with its feeder secondary school. Extra classes in mathematics and writing and expert tuition in French also provide good opportunities for more-able pupils to flourish, although on some occasions, the work they are given in lessons does not demand enough of them.
- Assessment data are also used purposefully to reduce the gap in attainment between pupils eligible for pupil premium funding and other pupils. Case studies record the successful impact of this expenditure on the well-being and progress of potentially vulnerable pupils.
- The curriculum's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a major strength of the school. Initiatives are well established, but leaders are not complacent. A pupils' diversity council has recently been set up to reflect the increasing number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds joining the school. Assemblies, for example, on Black History and the birth of the American Civil Rights Movement, provide pupils with a historical perspective on current events.
- The local authority has a secure overview of the school's work, and has supported the school effectively in the last 18 months with whole-staff training and initiatives to improve pupils' achievement in writing. School leaders, for their part, provide effective support and guidance to other local schools.
- The school works well with parents and carers to support their children's well-being and progress in school. However, parents and carers have few structured opportunities to contribute their views and to influence school improvement planning.
- Leaders have not succeeded in raising the overall quality of teaching since the previous inspection. Some inconsistencies remain as leaders do not always identify sharply in lesson observations ways in which teachers could improve their practice and tailor training to meet individual needs. Opportunities for staff to learn from the expertise of other colleagues in the school are not widespread.
- Recent funding for physical education is being used well to strengthen the curriculum but the school has, to date, only identified one measure – increased participation rates in sporting activities – to check whether funding has any subsequent impact on pupils' levels of fitness.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors ensure that national requirements for safeguarding are met.
 - They are well trained and fully involved in the running of the school. They ensure that senior leaders take account of their views, and hold them to account as necessary. They have a secure overview of the initiatives staff have taken to improve writing and their impact.
 - Governors have a good understanding of the quality of teaching. They make clear links between the performance of teachers and the impact this has on pupils' progress and ensure that pay rises and promotion are appropriate. They review and, where necessary, challenge targets for the headteacher's performance.
 - Governors know how and why pupil premium funding is spent in particular ways and check with senior leaders its impact on the achievement of eligible pupils.

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	149572
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	429486

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	360
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Edward Gee (Acting)
Headteacher	Max Vlahakis
Date of previous school inspection	12–13 January 2009
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