

Almond Hill Junior School

Almonds Lane, Stevenage, SG1 3RP

Inspection dates 10–11 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
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

- There is not enough good and outstanding teaching to bring about the improvements in pupils' progress which are needed.
- Too few pupils who join the school with average standards make better than expected progress in writing and mathematics.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium are not achieving sufficiently high standards in mathematics.
- Pupils have too few opportunities to write independently and at length or to record their mathematics work across a range of subjects.
- Some pupils do not work hard in lessons and occasionally stop other pupils from working hard as well.
- When senior leaders check the quality of teaching they do not follow-up points for improvement from the last check that they made rigorously enough.
- The information in behaviour and incident logs is not always clear.
- Governors, although supportive, do not challenge the school frequently to improve.

The school has the following strengths

- Standards in reading have improved and are now above average.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of how to keep safe, particularly with regard to their use of computers and the internet.
- Pupils enjoy school and their attendance is above average. Nearly all pupils arrive in good time for the start of school
- The school has formed a strong partnership with the local secondary school to help raise standards.
- Pupils have opportunities to take part in a wide range of clubs and sports throughout the year.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 17 lessons, looked at pupils' exercise books and talked to pupils about their work. The headteacher and deputy headteacher accompanied the inspectors to nine of the lesson observations.
- Meetings were held with senior and subject leaders, a representative from the local authority and school governors.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their views of the school and listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors talked to parents at the school gate and also took into account the opinions of the 31 parents who responded to the Parent View online questionnaire.
- Inspectors scrutinized a range of documentation including school performance information, minutes of governors' meetings, school improvement plans, performance management statements, teaching and learning monitoring records and behaviour and incident logs.

Inspection team

Robin Taverner, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sarah Warboys

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Almond Hill Junior school is a larger-than-average school.
- There are eight classes altogether with two classes in each year group.
- Most pupils come from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, additional funding for groups such as children looked-after by the local authority and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. A higher proportion of pupils than nationally are supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.
- The school has formed a strong partnership with the local secondary school. Staff and pupils from the secondary school work with pupils from the junior school in a variety of ways including supporting reading and teaching physical education.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching which is good and outstanding in order to improve the progress pupils make in writing and mathematics by:
 - giving pupils time every day to read the teachers' marking of their work and to make the necessary improvements, especially in mathematics
 - improving pupils', especially boys', attitudes to their work so that they concentrate more and try harder particularly with their writing
 - making sure that pupils are engaged in their learning at all times rather than sitting for too long listening to the teacher
 - sharing the good and outstanding practice which exists in the school so that all teaching leads to pupils making expected or better progress in all lessons
 - encouraging pupils to experience success by giving more opportunities for correcting and finishing work
 - giving pupils more opportunities to write independently and at length and to record their mathematics work independently across a range of subjects.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers in raising standards by:
 - making sure the success of all planned actions is judged by their impact on raising standards and improving rates of progress
 - following up regularly and urgently the points for improvement which arise when checking the quality of teaching so that pupils receive the best possible teaching at all times
 - improving record-keeping systems for behaviour and other incidents which happen in school
 - making sure governors challenge the school frequently and effectively about its performance.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Standards of achievement declined after the previous inspection in reading, writing and mathematics. However, standards are now improving and attainment has risen for the second year running. Standards remain broadly average for mathematics and writing which show that pupils do not make sufficient progress in these subjects from when they join the school.
- Too few pupils who join the school with knowledge and skills typical for their age make better than expected progress in writing and mathematics.
- In recent years, the gap between the attainment and progress of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium and the other pupils widened. In 2013 this gap narrowed significantly in reading and writing. In mathematics, the gap narrowed but pupils eligible for the pupil premium were still two terms behind their classmates.
- The school is working hard to close the gaps in achievement between pupils supported by the pupil premium and the other pupils and is using the extra funding well to make this happen. Good support is provided in lessons and additional lessons are given to help pupils who are falling behind. As a result, gaps between groups of pupils are continuing to narrow.
- The progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs varied in 2013 for the Year 6 pupils. Most pupils made expected progress but too few exceeded expected progress. However, teachers and teaching assistants provide good support in lessons and this is helping disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs currently in the school to improve their rates of progress.
- Pupils achieve higher standards in reading than in writing and mathematics. One of the reasons for this is because the pupils who find reading difficult receive regular help in school and read books which are enjoyable but also help them to improve their phonic (the sounds letters make) skills.
- The school uses ability grouping and, in the best lessons, high levels of challenge to make sure that more-able pupils make rapid progress. As a result, the school has been successful in increasing the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in reading and mathematics, but not as successful in writing where only small improvements have been achieved. This is because pupils do not have enough opportunities to write independently and at length.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because too few pupils make better than expected progress and, in recent years, the standards pupils achieve by the end of Year 6 have not been high enough, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- Good teaching is not evident in every lesson and in some lessons pupils do not have enough time to complete the task that is set because they sit for too long listening to the teacher. Pupils are often asked to discuss a question posed by the teacher with their learning partners. Sometimes, the time given for this is too long and pupils' concentration wavers.
- In some lessons, some pupils, often boys, are slow to begin their tasks, particularly when they need to complete a piece of writing. In these lessons, teachers do not act quickly to make sure

that no time is wasted and all pupils work hard, making the most of the time available.

- Teaching is not consistently good or outstanding across all year groups and the very best practice in school is not shared sufficiently with teachers and other adults. In the best lessons teachers make learning exciting for the pupils. For example, in a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils were asked to investigate a crime scene and plot scatter graphs showing the heart rates and body temperature of the suspects. In this lesson, pupils applied mathematics skills which were higher than is typical for their age.
- Where teaching is good or better, teachers encourage all pupils to produce the highest quality of work. They allow pupils to start their work at the level that is best for them, and provide challenges which ensure pupils learning moves on quickly in the lessons. For example, in one lesson involving problem solving, the challenges were set using a scale of chilli hotness from mild to extra hot.
- Marking of pupils' work has improved and is consistent across the school in English books. Pupils are given time to use the teachers' advice to improve their work. This good practice does not yet extend to mathematics books. Work is marked but pupils do not always have time to respond to their marking. In one lesson, a pupil had not been successful in solving a problem set the day before and was not given time to have another go at the problem. This meant that she had not experienced the success that she needed to encourage her enthusiasm for the subject.
- Pupils are not given regular opportunities to write independently and at length or to record mathematics work independently across a range of subjects. This is because too much use is made of worksheets or forms which have to be completed. However, fewer worksheets were seen in a sample of pupil's recent work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Behaviour requires improvement because in some lessons a small number of pupils do not work hard and by talking too much, when they should be working, stop others and themselves from doing their best.
- The school has recently introduced a programme to improve behaviour in the classroom but this is not yet being used consistently across the school and is, therefore, having a limited impact.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of how to keep safe, particularly with regard to their use of computers and the internet. Younger pupils described how they are taught not to believe everything they read on a website and have had the opportunity to construct a fictitious web page to reinforce this learning.
- Most pupils say they enjoy school and feel safe. Behaviour in the dining hall is good at lunch times and good behaviour was seen around the school and outside on the playground. However, some older pupils expressed concerns about name calling and bullying which they said is not always dealt with effectively by staff supervising at lunchtimes. This suggests that the behaviour observed by inspectors may not have been typical. Records kept of poor behaviour and other incidents are haphazard and do not show clearly how incidents are followed up or actions taken.
- Pupils are polite and friendly towards staff and visitors. Behaviour observed in a singing assembly was exemplary and all pupils took part enthusiastically.
- The school is successful at encouraging regular attendance and because of this attendance is above average. Nearly all pupils arrive on time for the beginning of the school day.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because leaders and managers have not improved teaching and learning sufficiently to bring about sustained improvement across the school.
- During the inspection, when they joined with inspectors to observe lessons, senior leaders had an accurate knowledge of essential features of a good lesson. Senior leaders provided concise feedback to teachers.
- Senior leaders have changed the way they check lessons recently and have introduced an effective method of recording observations including identifying strengths and weaknesses in pupils' learning. However, leaders could not demonstrate how areas of weakness are followed up routinely to ensure that pupils receive the best possible teaching at all times.
- The school has plans which show that it is focused upon improving teaching and raising standards. However, the plans are not clear as to how the improvements will be made and planned changes are not linked explicitly to targets to raise standards.
- When considering pay progression, the school can demonstrate how decisions are made based upon how effective staff are in their teaching and leadership roles.
- The school has arranged training for teachers who lead subjects. As a result, the leaders of mathematics and English have taken actions which have led to improvements in achievement in these subjects. However, further improvements are still needed.
- The primary school sport funding is being spent appropriately. For example, a specialist physical education teacher from the partner secondary school is being used to provide high quality physical education teaching for all pupils in the school. The school has plans to measure the impact of this work on pupils' health and well being.
- The pupil premium is also being spent appropriately and is being used to pay for teaching groups of pupils who are in danger of not making the progress they could. School performance information shows that this group work is helping to close the gap in attainment between eligible pupils and the others.
- The school meets all statutory requirements for safeguarding.
- The school's exciting and varied curriculum develops spiritual and cultural education effectively. Lapses in pupils' behaviour in some lessons indicate that social and moral education needs to improve.
- Parents are very supportive of the school and the school communicates regularly with parents in various ways including the use of up-to-date technology. Parents are invited into school on a regular basis and the school provides family learning opportunities which help to build positive relationships between home and school and support parents with helping their children at home.
- The school provides equal opportunities to its pupils through good support for groups and individual pupils in lessons. As a result, differences in the progress of different groups of pupils are being reduced. Discrimination is not tolerated.
- The school works well with representatives from the local authority who check the school's judgements about how well it is performing and help to train subject leaders.

■ The governance of the school:

- The school is supported by a knowledgeable Chair of Governors who is often in school. Governors are aware of the school's strengths but have an over generous view of how the school is performing. They fulfil their statutory functions adequately and have ensured that pupil premium and primary school sport funding is allocated appropriately. However, they were unaware that at the time of the inspection there was insufficient information on their website concerning the impact of the pupil premium. Governors know how pay is linked to the performance of teachers and are involved in the performance management of the headteacher. Governors have a realistic view of the quality of teaching in the school. They are aware of school performance information. Governors are keen to invest in training for school staff including leadership training so that subject leaders become skilled and school leaders of the future can be encouraged. Governor minutes lack detail and do not show that governors are persistent in their questioning around school performance issues. There are no points of action recorded and, therefore, no evidence that issues raised are followed up by governors systematically.

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	117221
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	425421

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	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nicky Clarke
Headteacher	Mrs J Lovelock
Date of previous school inspection	9 November 2010
Telephone number	01438 233660
Fax number	01438 235400
Email address	admin@almondhill.herts.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013

