

# Pirton School

High Street, Pirton, Hitchin, SG5 3PS

**Inspection dates** 22–23 October 2013

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

- Pirton is a happy, welcoming and well-ordered school. Relationships between pupils and staff are good.
- The school is well managed. The headteacher and other senior leaders are very positive role models for others. They share a common vision for the school with governors and staff and have high expectations. School leaders have ensured that there is continual improvement in teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Most teaching is good and some is outstanding. Pupils find lessons interesting and teachers plan activities that engage them well. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and in detail.
- Pupils achieve well. They make good progress in all subjects and reach standards above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils are happy and feel safe at school. They like their teachers, enjoy their learning and behave well.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage provides a bright and caring environment. Children engage in a wide range of stimulating activities and make good progress in their learning. They quickly settle into school life and learn how to cooperate with each other.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not always provide activities that stretch pupils of all abilities or give pupils time to respond to advice about how to improve their work.
- Pupils do not do as well in mathematics at Key Stage 2 as they do in English.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed eight lessons or parts of lessons, including seven jointly with the headteacher. He also looked at pupils' written work.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and six other governors, the headteacher and other school leaders. A telephone discussion took place with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector spoke to a group of pupils and informally with other pupils in lessons and around the school. He listened to pupils reading and talked to them about their reading habits.
- The inspector examined several of the school's documents. These included: the school's own evaluation of its performance and its improvement plan; information about pupils' progress and the support given to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs; evidence about the quality of teaching; and records relating to behaviour, safeguarding and attendance.
- The inspector took account of 42 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the views expressed by parents as they arrived at school to attend a cross country running event for pupils. He analysed 15 questionnaires returned by staff.

## Inspection team

James McVeigh, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Pirton School is smaller than the average-sized primary school. Children start school in the Reception class and there are five classes, each containing two year groups.
- The large majority of pupils come from a White British background and the remainder from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. There are very few pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (extra government funding for specific groups of pupils including those known to be eligible for free school meals and children in local authority care) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action and the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are close to the national averages.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school was undergoing rebuilding work at the time of the inspection and several rooms, including the staff room and library, were out of action.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
  - making sure teachers provide activities that will stretch pupils of all abilities
  - ensuring teachers give pupils opportunities to respond to their advice about how to improve their work in English and mathematics.
- Raise pupils' achievement in mathematics further in Key Stage 2 by:
  - building on pupils' good mathematical understanding at the end of Key Stage 1
  - making sure that key concepts of number and multiplication are clear to pupils before moving on to higher levels of work.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start school in the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge and skills below those expected for their age, particularly in communication and social skills. Staff in the Reception class focus on developing these skills and children quickly learn how to get on well with others. They rapidly develop self-confidence and willingly share their ideas in front of the class. A child volunteered clearly, 'I can tell the blue bear is the main character in the book' when the teacher asked the class what they could say about a book cover. They make good progress and start Year 1 with attainment that is above expectations in most areas apart from literacy.
- Pupils continue to make good progress throughout Key Stages 1 and 2. The standards pupils reach at the end of Year 2 have continued to improve and in 2013 were above the national average in writing and well above in reading and mathematics. Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have been maintained above national averages, reflecting good progress in all subjects and in all years, though progress in mathematics is not as strong as in English. Pupils of all abilities, including those who are more-able, achieve well. A few pupils in Years 5 and 6 have not learned multiplication and number facts well enough yet.
- Progress has shown continual improvement over the last three years. In 2013, the proportion of Year 6 pupils who made more progress than expected in Key Stage 2 was above average in writing and mathematics, and close to that found nationally in reading.
- Children in Reception and pupils in Key Stage 1 quickly learn how to read and they develop good vocabularies. Phonics (the sounds that letters make) is taught well and teachers pronounce the sounds clearly. Regular reading is encouraged effectively and parents are given good support to help with their children's reading at home. The result of the 2013 phonics screening check was well above the national average and much improved upon the previous year.
- Pupils engage well in physical education and sports, including swimming, regularly and say they enjoy participating. For example, during the inspection the whole school took part in an afternoon of cross country running. Pupils know regular exercise supports their health and physical well-being.
- The school begins the process of identifying pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs early, making good use of external specialists to identify and support them. Teachers and teaching assistants provide extra support through a range of well-planned and well-targeted activities. Parents are closely involved at every stage. One class has a significant proportion of pupils who have special educational needs. The school has applied for and received extra money, the Exceptional Needs Cluster Funding, to improve the support they receive. The headteacher tracks the progress these pupils make closely to ensure the interventions are effective and to check that this group makes good progress.
- Pupils eligible for the pupil premium make good progress in all subjects. They are supported effectively through one-to-one teaching from trained teaching assistants and contributions towards school visits that enhance their experience of the world. In the last two years, all of the very few eligible pupils also had special educational needs. They made good progress from their starting points. In 2013, the attainment gap between these pupils and their classmates had narrowed in both English and mathematics.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers have established good relationships with pupils. They have created good climates for learning: calm and well-ordered classrooms with bright displays reflect pupils' achievements and record key points to support current learning. Teachers plan activities that interest and motivate pupils well. They have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and of their work ethic.
- Literacy and mathematics are taught well. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to practise and consolidate their literacy and numeracy skills in a wide range of subjects. For example, pupils in Year 6 wrote about life in Ancient Greece and learned about prime numbers when they researched famous Greek mathematicians.
- Teachers consistently explain what they expect pupils to be able to do by the end of the lesson and the steps they need to take to be successful. Pupils are encouraged to consider how they are learning and which qualities, such as resilience or perseverance, are necessary for different activities. Activities are designed to develop ideas logically and at a good pace for effective learning. Teachers use skilful questioning to make pupils think hard about their answers, for example, by asking for explanations of how answers were reached or by providing thinking time.
- Pupils are given good opportunities to discuss their ideas with others and to assess their own work. Teachers have good subject knowledge and model expected outcomes clearly so that pupils can understand how well they have done. Pupils in Years 2 and 3 were able to consider how well they had followed the 'steps to success' and used 'thumbs up or down' to indicate their self-assessment to the teacher.
- Children are taught well in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Staff know the children well, having earlier visited their homes or pre-school settings to discuss children's individual needs and abilities. They accurately and regularly assess the progress each child is making. Bright displays in the Reception class are rich in text and children have good opportunities to develop reading and writing skills. Teachers plan a wide range of activities linked to a theme that stimulates children's interest and curiosity. During the inspection, children produced a cover page for their own story book involving research on the internet, drawing, painting and cutting out.
- Teachers assess pupils' progress regularly and make good use of the information in planning appropriate future activities or reshaping the lesson. They mark pupils' written work regularly and in detail, celebrating what pupils have done well and often advising them on how they could improve their work next time. However, pupils are not always given time to respond to the marking, for example, by answering an extension follow-up question or correcting previously marked work.
- With two year groups in each class, the ability range of pupils is wider than is usually found. Teachers deploy well-trained teaching assistants to support different groups of pupils effectively and plan a range of activities for pupils. However, the planned activities do not always stretch all pupils far enough.

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

- Pupils like their teachers. They enjoy learning and find lessons interesting. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 had great fun in a short, lively card game involving mental arithmetic to consolidate their knowledge of multiplication tables. They also became engrossed in investigating their own ideas about patterns they might find when dividing three-digit numbers.

- Pupils say that inappropriate behaviour is rare in lessons. They know the school's rules and that good behaviour helps them to succeed at school. Pupils are responsive and teachers have to spend little time in correcting behaviour. Pupils collaborate well in groups, listening to each other's ideas carefully and agreeing how to carry out activities. Occasionally, when introductions are overlong, pupils' attention wanders.
- Around the school, pupils are polite and courteous. Teachers model respectful behaviour in all their interactions with pupils and one another. In the playground, pupils make good use of the play equipment and have the opportunity to join in organised games. Most pupils behave well and are considerate of others.
- Governors, staff, pupils themselves and most parents agree that pupils behave well at school. School records show that, over the last few years, there have been very few incidents of misbehaviour and they have been handled sensitively and effectively. Adult support for the very few pupils who require specialist help to manage their behaviour is effective.
- Pupils can distinguish bullying from minor disagreements and know the different forms it can take. They state that bullying is uncommon and sorted out quickly when adults are made aware of it.
- Pupils have learned how to be healthy and safe. They have a good understanding of 'healthy' meals and why regular exercise is necessary. They have heard from the police and the fire department and know about things such as road and fire safety and 'stranger danger'. Pupils know about the potential dangers of the internet and how to make use of it safely.
- The school has successful strategies to promote good attendance, for example by responding quickly to first-day absences, including visiting pupils' homes if necessary. Attendance has been above the national average for the last three years.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- Governors and staff have high expectations and share a common vision for the school, namely, to provide an education of the highest quality for each child. Senior leaders have accurately identified the school's strengths and areas for development and set appropriate priorities for continued improvement, with detailed plans. Governors, parents, staff and pupils contribute to the school improvement plans, which are reviewed regularly by the headteacher and governors.
- The headteacher and other senior leaders are very positive role models for staff and pupils alike through their professionalism, enthusiasm, clear focus and the way they deal with others in the school. The headteacher has established strong relationships with other small schools to develop common strategies across the county.
- Leaders focus relentlessly on improving the quality of teaching and the achievement of every pupil. The headteacher regularly observes teaching, scrutinises pupils' work and progress and gives succinct feedback to teachers that highlights what they are doing well and what improvements are needed. Teachers have challenging targets to meet, based on the proportion of pupils making more than expected progress and linked to the school's improvement plan.
- Teachers, teaching assistants and leaders of subjects are given good opportunities for relevant professional development, and staff meetings are used to share good practice. Some teachers have visited outstanding schools to enhance their own teaching. Improvements to provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage were made following such a visit.

- Pupils' progress is monitored closely and signs of underachievement are tackled quickly through well-targeted extra support. This helps to make sure that pupils receive equal opportunities and the school is effective in discouraging all forms of discrimination
- The school has established productive relationships with parents, who say that their children are making good progress and that they get useful ideas from the school about how to help their children at home. Parents of Reception children are very pleased with the way the school helped their children settle into school.
- The school provides a broad and balanced range of subjects with a two-year rolling programme of topics to ensure pupils in mixed-year classes do not repeat the same material. Topics are introduced with an exciting activity to engage pupils straight away, such as visits to a museum or dressing up as historical characters, and include good opportunities for pupils to practise and develop their literacy and numeracy skills. The school's well-organised allotment is an excellent resource for science.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well through, for example, assemblies, visits to places of worship and visitors from different backgrounds who demonstrate elements of their culture, for example, Indian cooking.
- The extra sports funding for primary schools is being used to develop the school's expertise in teaching a wide range of sporting skills.
- The local authority has given good support to the school, providing it with a clear external view of its performance. The authority recognises that the school is continuing to improve and needs light-touch support only.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The governing body has a good range of relevant skills and governors have received training to further develop their understanding of school data. They are well aware of the school's performance and particularly the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress. Regular reports from the headteacher are augmented by governors' own focused visits to see lessons and speak to teachers and pupils. Governors ensure the school is continually moving forward by providing good support and asking searching questions.
  - Governors contribute to the school's own evaluation of its performance and the consequent development plan. With the support of the local authority, they set robust targets for the performance of the headteacher. The governing body has managed the school's finances well, including through the current rebuilding programme. Governors ensure that teachers' movement up the pay scale is used to reward good practice, and that the pupil premium is allocated effectively to promote better achievement for eligible pupils. Safeguarding arrangements fully meet statutory 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117128
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	429551

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>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	140
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Nicola Robbins
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jeni Houghton
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12 January 2009
<b>Telephone number</b>	01462 712370
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