

St Albans Road Infant School

St Albans Road, Dartford, Kent, DA1 1TE

Inspection dates 23–24 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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.

- Pupils achieve well in this school. By the end of Year 2, attainment is above average and pupils have made good progress from their starting points, especially in reading.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress and achieve well.
- Good teaching over time ensures that pupils, including those with disabilities and/or special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, learn effectively.
- Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to the good learning taking place, especially when pupils with special educational needs are taught in small groups outside the classroom. They work in very close partnership with teachers and bring an additional range of helpful skills and experiences into the classrooms.
- Behaviour around the school is good. Most pupils have good attitudes to learning. They say that they feel safe in school and know how to stay safe.
- The school provides very good support for those pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable.
- The strong leadership and management of the headteacher, supported well by the senior and middle leaders and the effective governing body, is responsible for the significant improvements that have taken place since the school was last inspected.
- Thorough and effective checks on teaching and learning and their impact upon pupils' achievement identify strengths and areas for improvement. This information is used well in the good quality school improvement plan.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching has not been consistently good enough to challenge more able pupils in writing and mathematics so fewer pupils achieve the higher Level 3 than in reading.
- Marking in mathematics does not show pupils the next steps in their learning clearly enough.
- The support provided for pupils with disabilities and/or special educational needs is not as good in the classroom as it is when these pupils are withdrawn for small group support.
- Although the school is making strenuous efforts to improve attendance, it remains a little lower than in similar schools.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 10 teachers and some adults other than teachers teaching during visits to 29 lessons or parts of lessons, including some small groups. Some of the visits were carried out together with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils, members of the governing body, teachers and support staff, and a visiting specialist from the local authority. A discussion was held with the school's improvement advisor.
- Inspectors observed the school's work, looked at the school's own self-evaluation and the school improvement plan and evaluated samples of pupils' work alongside senior staff.
- Other documents looked at included: curriculum planning; documents relating to attendance, safeguarding and child protection; records of pupils' attainment and progress; records of behaviour; records relating to the monitoring of teaching; and minutes of the governing body.
- Inspectors took account of the 35 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Some parents and carers were spoken to at the start of the school day and others were spoken to during the parent/teacher consultations and at the end of the school day. Questionnaires received from nine staff were analysed.

Inspection team

Stephen Lake, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Teresa Davies	Additional Inspector
Ann Short	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is larger than most other schools. It serves a wide area with a small but significant number of pupils living some distance from the school, partly because of parental choice but partly due to places not being available at other schools.
- The school has a nursery class but only around a half of those pupils who enter the Reception classes have attended the nursery provision.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs who are supported at school action is well above average. The proportion who are supported at school action plus or who have statements of special educational needs is above average. The most significant areas of need are speech and communication difficulties and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. A small number of pupils are in the process of being diagnosed for difficulties on the autism spectrum.
- A growing proportion of the youngest pupils are known to speak English as an additional language although across the school the percentage of these pupils is average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium (which is funding to support children in local authority care, children of service families and those known to be eligible for free school meals) is average.
- Many members of the senior leadership team are new in post in the last 15 months.
- The school runs a breakfast club.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that attainment in mathematics and writing matches that in reading by:
 - ensuring that assessment information is used effectively to plan work that matches the needs of all pupils, especially those who are more able
 - providing tasks in whole-class sessions for pupils with disabilities or special educational needs that are at least as good as those set in withdrawal groups so that these pupils make accelerated progress in all of their learning
 - review the way pupils' work is marked to ensure that marking in mathematics shows the next steps as clearly as that in English books
- Improve pupils' behaviour and safety so it moves towards outstanding by:
 - working with the local authority education welfare officer to seek other ways in which the attendance of the small group of vulnerable pupils can be improved
 - embedding securely the improved systems for managing behaviour and ensuring that all teachers use them consistently to support those pupils with very challenging behaviour.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Children typically start school with skills below those expected, and a small but significant proportion start with extremely low skills. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and achieve well so that their skills and understanding at the start of Year 1 are now broadly in line with that found nationally. This is an improved picture over the last few years. A small group with considerable learning difficulties start Year 1 with at least below expectations.
- Attainment has risen significantly faster than nationally since the school's previous inspection. Pupils make good progress against their starting points and achieve well to attain above average standards at the end of Year 2. However, attainment in reading is better than that seen in writing and mathematics because although more pupils than average attain the higher Level 3 in reading, the proportion attaining this level in writing and mathematics is broadly average. Attainment in writing is already rising further as a result of the 'Big Write' initiative that the school has introduced to encourage pupils to write at length.
- The school has very good systems for teaching pupils to read. A much more structured system for teaching phonics (the linking of letters and sounds) has been introduced and all groups of pupils are making better than expected progress in reading. Attainment in national assessments at the end of Year 2 is above average and pupils currently in Year 2 are on track to achieve at least the same or better results.
- Pupils with special educational needs often make accelerated progress in their small group sessions or where they receive one-to-one support. When these pupils are taught alongside other pupils in the classroom, they make the same good progress as other pupils but do not make the accelerated progress necessary to close the gap between their attainment and that of other pupils.
- Those pupils entitled to support under the pupil premium make the same good progress as other pupils. Their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is around three months lower than that of other pupils in the school but similar to that of all pupils nationally. When compared to pupils nationally, the gap in the attainment of this group in all subjects has closed from around six months lower to virtually nothing. The in-school gap has remained similar to last year because the attainment of all groups of pupils is rising rapidly.
- Pupils with English as an additional language are supported well and the high focus on phonics is improving their language skills rapidly so that they make accelerated progress to attain standards similar to those of all pupils by the end of Year 2.
- Pupils achieve well in other subjects such as history and information and communication technology.
- The school does not have access to a field but pupils still have good access to physical activity in the hall and on the playground so that they achieve at a similar rate to pupils in other schools in physical education.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View and those spoken to were very positive about the quality of teaching. Governors, staff and pupils expressed similar views. Inspection evidence supports these views and observations of current teaching confirmed that this is being maintained and improved upon.
- Pupils are engaged and motivated by the way teachers present and teach the well-planned curriculum. This not only ensures that good learning takes place but makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils are given many high quality opportunities to develop their curiosity and creativity. They are encouraged to use their imagination, for example when thinking of ways to praise a friend,

and are taught to respect the feelings and viewpoints of others.

- In the large majority of lessons, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They assess pupils' progress well and normally set challenging tasks matched to what pupils already know, can do and understand. In some lessons, higher attaining pupils receive additional challenges that extend their learning even further. For example, more able pupils in Year 2 made outstanding progress in their writing in a lesson that explored their understanding of verbs, adjectives and similes as they constructed complex descriptive sentences. Nevertheless, a little inconsistency in the challenge for more able pupils remains between classes, especially in mathematics.
- In another high quality lesson, pupils made outstanding progress in developing their understanding of the creation story across a range of faiths. This lesson not only supported pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well but also made a very strong contribution to pupils' writing skills as they re-told the story.
- Clear targets for improvement are set for all pupils, especially in reading and writing. Adults explain carefully to pupils what it is they need to do to achieve their targets, and in English books marking sets out the next steps clearly for more able pupils to read and follow. However, this is not yet consistent across all subjects and all groups of pupils. In mathematics, marking does not always set out the next steps for pupils, especially those who are more able, to ensure they move on rapidly in their learning. This slows learning in mathematics a little.
- Teachers plan together very closely in year groups to ensure equality of opportunity across the school and avoid discrimination. In phonics, pupils are placed in ability groups that make good use of teachers and teaching assistants to ensure a high adult to pupil ratio, which is enabling the accelerated progress in reading. Teachers and teaching assistants work in very close partnership. Teaching assistants are well trained and make a valuable contribution to the learning taking place.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs receive very good support in small groups. Those with particular difficulties receive focused teaching that breaks their learning down into very small easily achievable steps that ensure very good progress. For some pupils with disabilities or special educational needs, tasks set within the classroom are not always matched closely enough to need and next steps are not explained to pupils as clearly as they are explained in small group situations.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- The large majority of pupils behave very well. Behaviour in and around the school at playtime and lunchtimes and before and after school is consistently good. Nevertheless, a very small group of pupils, most of whom have significant additional needs, causes occasional disruption to lessons, and pupils commented upon this.
- The large majority of those parents and carers who responded to Parent View and those spoken to along with staff and governors agree that behaviour is good overall. Along with pupils, staff and governors, they are aware of the low-level disruptive behaviour of the very small group of pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable or who have significant additional needs.
- The revised procedures for promoting good behaviour are understood by pupils and ensure the good behaviour in most classes, although they are not yet fully embedded and used consistently. Those with significant problems have their own individualised behaviour plans that are monitored very closely. These show that the behaviour of this small group is being managed well and the number of incidents, including well-justified exclusions, is reducing as the pupils learn to manage their own behaviour better. This successfully prevents disruption to other pupils in most cases.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying, including discrimination and prejudice-based bullying. They understand how to keep themselves safe and know about avoiding cyber bullying and unsafe sites on the internet.
- The school works very hard to improve attendance although the very high proportion of pupils

with additional needs, including medical conditions, and those whose parents find getting to the school difficult mean that attendance is slightly below that found in similar schools. A robust approach to not authorising holidays in term time is reducing the percentage of pupils whose attendance causes concern. Other strategies such as the breakfast club and the organisation of car and taxi sharing are enabling further improvement in the attendance of those who live some distance away.

The leadership and management are good

- All staff and governors share the headteacher's ambitious vision of how the school can improve further. Strengths and areas for development are identified very clearly and the school's actions on areas for improvement have resulted in a significant improvement since the last inspection. This demonstrates a strong capacity to improve further.
- Robust and successful action has been taken over the last two years to strengthen the quality of teaching, though some inconsistencies remain between classes and subjects. Observations of lessons are used effectively to identify how teaching can be improved, and good quality training is provided.
- Performance management targets set for teachers make good use of pupil progress information, with regular reviews to check progress towards targets. The headteacher has ensured that salary increases for teachers are linked clearly to improvements in pupils' progress and to meeting the national Teachers' Standards.
- The local authority and the local consortium of schools provide good support for the continuous professional development taking place. Succession planning is clear and effective. The new middle leaders speak highly of the effective systems for developing them in their new roles.
- Detailed assessment procedures enable easy checks on equality of opportunity and possible discrimination, and provide good information to the governing body and senior leaders on school performance. However, the system is currently quite dependent upon the leader with responsibility for assessment, and the new middle leaders do not yet have a secure enough understanding of pupils' achievement in their own area to take actions to raise achievement in their subjects. This is already being addressed through professional development.
- Safeguarding meets requirements and the training of all staff and governors in this area is up to date. Strong and effective links with parents and carers and with a range of local authority agencies ensure that pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable are cared for very well.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has elected a new chair and vice chair within the last year. These have led a review of governance to ensure that governors provide strong direction to the work of the school. Good quality training provided by the local authority is enabling governors to ask about how well pupils are learning, and why. On visits to the school, governors check on the impact of spending, especially the pupil premium funding, and hold the headteacher and senior staff to account for raising pupils' achievement. The governors check upon the quality of school meals and the chair regularly eats with the pupils to sample the food. Governors support the headteacher well but also challenge effectively by requiring detailed reports on the effectiveness of measures put in place to improve achievement and attendance. They have been innovative in using the pupil premium grant to support raising achievement, for example running a literacy booster group linked to the breakfast club. The grant for supporting pupils' physical education is allocated to providing additional support in physical education and providing training for teachers in this area. The criteria for evaluating the impact of this grant are under review to make them clearer. Governors ensure that management of the headteacher's performance includes challenging targets on school performance. Governors are well aware of what is being done to reward good teachers and tackle areas for improvement.

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	118249
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	426454

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	311
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Hudson
Headteacher	Karen Major
Date of previous school inspection	19–20 September 2011
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