

Black Firs Primary School

Longdown Road, Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 4QJ

Inspection dates

5–6 November 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		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils' behaviour and safety are outstanding. Relationships are excellent and pupils are very supportive of one another. Their attitudes to learning are exemplary and they feel entirely safe in school. Attendance is consistently above average.
- From generally expected, and sometimes lower than expected starting points, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are given a good start.
- Good progress is now firmly established through the school and shows continuous improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils achieve well in all subjects.
- Above average standards in English and mathematics over time, at the end of Year 6, have been maintained and standards at the end of Year 2 have improved significantly.
- The quality of teaching is good and some is outstanding. Teachers' expectations are high and there are some exciting activities in lessons. Teamwork is strong.
- Leaders have responded very well to support from the local authority since the previous inspection
- Leadership and management, including governance of the school are good. Successful management of teaching and learning has improved the quality of teaching and has a good impact on pupils' achievement. The school continues to improve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The proportion of outstanding teaching is still too low to make it outstanding overall.
- Some of the most-able pupils do not always reach the standards that they are capable of in writing and mathematics. The most able are not always given time to work on their own early enough in the lesson, slowing the pace of learning.
- Teachers' marking in mathematics, especially for the most-able pupils is not helpful enough in showing them how to improve.
- Resources used in some lessons are too limited to allow pupils to learn for themselves.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 16 lessons and part lessons, two of which were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- There were discussions with staff, members of the governing body, pupils, parents and a representative from the local authority.
- Also taken into account were 109 responses from parents via the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) as well as questionnaires completed by staff.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and examined a wide range of documentation including: national assessment data and the school's own assessments; the school's own view of its work; minutes from governing body meetings; consultancy reports about the school's work; safeguarding information and samples of pupils' work.

Inspection team

Kevin Johnson, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Terry Bond	Additional Inspector
Mark Hilton	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a slightly larger than average-sized primary school in which almost all pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is very low compared to other schools. The pupil premium is additional funding for those who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- A below average proportion of pupils is supported through school action.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also below average
- The school meets current floor standards which are the government's minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress at the end of Year 6.
- Provision for children prior to entering Reception Year is available on site. This provision is funded separately from the school and was not part of the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order that all most-able pupils reach their potential in writing and mathematics, improve the quality of teaching to outstanding by:
 - making sure that there is always clear and challenging provision for the most-able pupils in all lessons
 - ensuring that marking in mathematics, and especially for most-able pupils, always gives clear guidance about next steps in learning
 - maintaining good pace of learning for all pupils in all lessons and ensuring that the most-able pupils have opportunities to challenge themselves by beginning work earlier in the lesson on their own
 - making best use of all available resources to give pupils better opportunities to learn on their own.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children's abilities vary when they enter Reception class. Generally, they are in line with expectations for their age but some are below expectations, particularly in communication and language skills and, increasingly, in mathematical understanding.
- Children get off to a good start. Close links with pre-school providers is beginning to show positive results especially in children's social skills and readiness for school. They make good progress in Reception class because of good teaching and well planned activities. Most children achieve a good level of development by the time they move into Year 1 and some are more advanced.
- Good progress in Key Stage 1 has seen standards in reading, writing and mathematics improve significantly since the previous inspection. The proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in phonics testing (letters and the sounds that they make) in Year 1 is much better than the national average. This is resulting in good progress in reading and writing by the end of Year 2 with a rapid rise in the number of pupils reaching the higher Level 3.
- Standards at Key Stage 2 have been consistently above average since before the previous inspection. The picture shown by unvalidated national data for 2013 is similar in English overall but there was an untypical dip in mathematics, and to some extent writing. This was largely because fewer than expected pupils achieved the higher Level 5. Pupils' use of grammar, punctuation and spelling, and their reading skills, however, were above average. In this year group, there was an unusually high proportion of pupils in with special educational needs. Nevertheless, school assessments show clearly that all pupils made good progress from their previous lower starting points on entering Key Stage 2, which for several pupils in this year group was in Year 5.
- Pupils' current work indicates that the typically above average standards in English and mathematics, and their good progress, are on track to be maintained.
- Although overall across the school the most-able pupils make good progress, for some it is not always as good as for other pupils. This means that they do not always reach the higher levels of attainment that they are capable of, particularly in writing and mathematics. Their progress is sometimes hampered in lessons because they are not always given all the opportunities they need to work on their own and challenge themselves. School leaders' current focus is the achievement of most-able pupils to ensure that they too have all the opportunities they need to reach their full potential.
- Pupils enjoy reading and achieve well. In Year 2, they are able to retell the stories they have read and talk about their favourite characters. They read accurately because they use phonics skills well and practise regularly at home. Pupils in Year 6 read widely. They are very confident readers, using punctuation and good expression to show their understanding of what they read. They are very clear about the authors and kinds of books they like.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are given consistently good support and care. The co-ordinator for this provision is very sensitive to pupils' particular needs, whether learning, emotional or physical and is watchful over their good and sometimes better progress.
- Although relatively few pupils are supported by the pupil premium, they achieve well because leaders actively promote equality of opportunity. Where attainment gaps are evident at Key Stage 1, they generally disappear by the end of Key Stage 2. Most recent unvalidated national data show that pupils in 2013 achieved better than similar pupils nationally and generally as well as other pupils in the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- School leaders have responded well to the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection and fully dealt with the weaknesses identified. Consequently, there is now consistently good teaching across the school in all subjects, with some that is outstanding.
- In most lessons there is a good pace to learning. Introductions are brisk, giving pupils more time to get on with practical learning. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are high. These are usually clearly stated, along with what will make successful learning, at the beginning of the lesson. Pupils are in no doubt about what is expected of them and get on and work confidently.
- A good example was in a mathematics lesson where pupils received clear instruction about how to tackle word problems then used computers to think through actual life-related problems and work out the answers for themselves. However, the pace of learning is not always so brisk for the most-able pupils especially, when they are not given the chance to start practical work soon enough in the lesson.
- Although pupils are taught to use technological resources competently there are a few missed opportunities for its use in some lessons to encourage more pupils to learn on their own. For example, pupils in Year 5 and 6 gained some exciting knowledge and insights into how carbon dioxide can be used to 'launch a rocket' during a practical science lesson. However, science investigation did not progress to the next level because pupils did not apply technology skills to their recording of the investigation. Similarly, limited resources in a geography lesson where teaching was generally good, learning was too directed rather than through independent investigation and discovery and application of research skills.
- Teamwork is a strength of teaching in the school. Pupils enjoy the way that they are taught in different groups by different teachers and parents also support the school's 'team-teaching' approach. It means also that teaching assistants' skills and experiences are used fully and effectively alongside those of class teachers to cater for pupils' varying needs and abilities.
- Literacy and numeracy are taught well. Teachers use imaginative ways to help pupils think of ideas. In one lesson, the teacher provided a range of different artefacts for pupils to handle and use their senses in order to come up with creative sentences for their writing. Both literacy and mathematics are used well across the curriculum. There are many examples of writing in different subjects and an impressive display, for example, of how mathematics can be applied to art.
- Teachers use assessment well. Their high expectations are underpinned by a very thorough school system for checking pupils' progress, so they know pupils' abilities well. Questioning in lessons is good when testing pupils' understanding and moving their thinking on. Teachers stop activities during the lesson to check that pupils are still on track to reach their lesson goals.
- There are inconsistencies in the effectiveness of marking. While there is some very good practice to be seen, especially in literacy work, there is sometimes too little help for them in mathematics, particularly for the most-able pupils, where there is, for example, a lack of modelling to correct pupils' mistakes and insufficient comment on how to improve or build on what they have done.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils' consistently above average attendance, which is showing signs of being even better in the current year, is a clear indication of how pupils view school. Pupils enjoy all that they do and are extremely keen to succeed in their learning. An example of these highly positive attitudes comes from a lower junior pupil who suggested to the teacher that if he ran out of time for his writing he could always finish it at home.
- Pupils particularly enjoy the range of after-school activities on offer. Sport clubs are very well attended as well as the active residential visit. They contribute much to pupils' social

development, physical well-being and good achievement in physical education.

- Pupils are very positive about their own behaviour and safety in school and their views are endorsed by staff and parents. Pupils say that they feel entirely safe in school. They share very trusting relationships with the adults who care for them. Pupils understand fully the different forms that bullying can take, including misuse of the Internet and mobile phones and state strongly that there is no bullying in school. They know how to deal with any risks, should they occur.
- Pupils' invariable politeness, good manners and friendliness are very much part of the school's ethos and a strong measure of how much has been done to bring about improvement. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is usually exemplary.
- Pupils are very mindful of one another because staff members are first-class role models. Relationships are excellent and where there may be a falling out school council members say that they help pupils to make amends. They are sure that there is no offensive name-calling, racist or otherwise and confidently claim that 'If there were it would be sorted by the teachers.'
- Links with a South African school through use of e-mail and visits give pupils a deeper understanding of a different culture and lifestyle and help them to be tolerant and respectful of others.
- Pupils contribute a great deal to the everyday life of the school. The school council takes a leading role during assemblies when achievements are celebrated, by handing out certificates. Some other duties are to welcome visitors, contribute in the appointment of new staff, and check that the school is doing all that it can to save energy and resources.
- Pupils are proud of Black Firs. Overall, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and by the time they leave they are very well-prepared socially and academically to move on to their next schools.

The leadership and management are good

- School leaders at all levels are very ambitious for the school's continuing improvement. Their vision for how successful the school can become is fully shared and is evident in the high academic targets set for pupils.
- Following the previous inspection, leaders have vigorously addressed the key issues of progress and teaching. The headteacher's positive response to targeted local authority support has brought about immense improvement to the way in which records of pupils' progress are kept. These now provide a powerful tool for teachers, by underpinning higher expectations, setting more challenging targets and driving improvement in pupils' achievement throughout the school.
- Senior leaders play a crucial part in checking the school's work, supporting colleagues and maintaining standards. They have gathered a full and accurate view of how well the school performs. Leaders are not complacent. They know that their next steps are to ensure that the most-able pupils in all classes always achieve as well as they can. Careful monitoring is now in place to make sure that all achieve their aspirational targets in writing and mathematics.
- Successful management of teaching and the management of teachers' performance have been central to the school's improvement. There is a robust programme of quality checking by senior leaders. Essential professional training and support are planned well. A revision of teachers' roles and use of their particular strengths has contributed to the successful management of teaching and learning. There is a clear understanding that performance is measured against the Teachers' Standards resulting in consistently good and sometimes better teaching across the whole school.
- Given the school's record of improvement over the past two years, including improvements in pupils' behaviour and safety, leaders amply show their capacity to lead the school further forward, especially in their drive to lift teaching to outstanding.
- Middle leaders manage their subject areas well and have brought some exciting development to the curriculum. They are already planning for the revised national curriculum to be introduced in 2014 in order to maintain the creative approach to learning that pupils currently enjoy. Pupils'

learning is enriched by a very good range of additional activities that contribute well to their good achievement across all subjects taught in the school especially art, music and physical education as well as science.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body has strengthened since the previous inspection. It provides strong challenge and support and holds the school rigorously to account for standards and teaching. Academic performance is checked against national assessment data to provide a full picture of how well the school does. Governors are aware of how the teachers' salary structure is linked to their performance and challenge school leaders in order to be sure that performance management is effective. Pupil premium funding is spent efficiently on additional staff and resources and gaps in attainment are almost non-existent. Governors currently challenge the school over the performance of the most-able pupils to ensure that equality of opportunity is consistent. Recently allocated primary school sports funding has been earmarked to extend provision for swimming in order to match the already good provision for other aspects of the subject, and to raise the level of teachers' skills to sustain pupils' good achievement and physical well-being in the future. Statutory duties with regard to policies and financial procedures are managed efficiently and measures to keep pupils and staff safe meet all 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	111045
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	426114

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	266
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Whitewright
Headteacher	Martin Casserley
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2011
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