

Halebank Church of England (VC) Primary School

Heathview Road, Widnes, Cheshire, WA8 8UZ

Inspection dates 28–29 November 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.

- Children enter the Reception class with skills that are lower than those typical for age. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school and attain standards that are average by the end of Year 6.
- Teaching is good. Teachers are very enthusiastic about their teaching and so pupils are very involved and motivated to learn. Teachers use good questioning skills to develop understanding and adapt their lessons to meet the needs of pupils well. Support staff work effectively with pupils and as a result, all groups of pupils achieve well.
- Behaviour is good and pupils feel safe. Pupils enjoy working together. They have positive attitudes to their learning and know that it is important to try their best. Attendance is average and there have been no exclusions.
- The headteacher is reflective and provides good leadership for the school. The school's view of its performance is honest. Both the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement are improving because these areas are carefully checked by senior leaders and governors. The school has good capacity to move improve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is good and not outstanding. Most-able pupils are not consistently challenged so that they attain the higher levels.
- Teachers' good quality, careful marking of pupils' writing is not yet consistent in other subjects.
- Teachers with responsibility for leading and managing curriculum subjects are not all sufficiently rigorous in carrying out their roles in order to help pupils to achieve even more.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed four lessons. Two of the lessons were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils, senior leaders, and teachers with responsibility for leading and managing subjects and key stages. A meeting was held with a group of governors. A telephone conversation took place with a representative from the local authority.
- Results from two responses to the on-line questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into consideration by the inspector. The inspector spoke with parents during the Christmas Draw event which was held at the school. These views have been taken into consideration during the inspection process.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents including: the school's data showing pupils' current progress; documents relating to the school's own view of its performance; the school improvement plan; records relating to attendance and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Pritiben Patel, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than most primary schools.
- Most pupils are of White British background. A small number of pupils are from mixed heritages.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding is nearly double that of schools nationally. The pupil premium is additional funding to support pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The numbers of pupils in each year group vary across the school.
- Pupils are taught in mixed-age groups throughout the school. The Reception class is taught separately.
- There is a breakfast club at the school from 8.30am to 8.50am daily.
- Halebank Pre-School shares the same site as the school. It is run by an independent provider and has its own inspection report.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning from good to outstanding by:
 - ensuring that the most-able pupils are consistently challenged across the school so that they attain the higher levels
 - spreading the good practice in teachers' marking in writing to all subjects.
- Improve the work of staff with responsibility for leading and managing curriculum subjects by ensuring they rigorously check and measure the progress that pupils make in each of their subjects in order to inform leaders about ways to help pupils to achieve even more.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Children enter the Reception class with skills that are well below those expected for their age, particularly in writing. They make good progress and by the time they enter Year 1, their skills have developed from well below to below expectations for their age. This represents good progress from their starting points. Children make good progress because staff are very encouraging and plan activities which are interesting and exciting. For example, due to the recent birthday of a child in the class the teacher taught the sounds that letters make by using the items that would be needed for a birthday party. The children were involved and learnt well.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the 2013 Year 1 phonics (the sounds that letters make) check was below average. This is because the children have lower starting points when they first start school. Staff have been given additional training and pupils are now taught in ability groups so that teaching matches pupils' needs. These changes are beginning to show an improvement in pupils' understanding of phonics.
- The standards pupils reach in all areas at the end of Year 2 are just below those of schools nationally. However, standards in writing in 2013 were not as good in comparison to those reached in reading and mathematics. School leaders have put a variety of strategies in place to improve standards, which are having a positive impact on pupils' achievement. For example, pupils' writing is celebrated in order to encourage pupils to write. Teachers set clear targets for pupils to help them to improve their writing. The curriculum is adapted to provide meaningful contexts for pupils to write.
- Standards at the end of Year 6 are average. Small year groups have a significant effect on the figures that represent the group's overall standards and, therefore, sometimes mask good achievement. The standards reached over time have been average. However, in 2012 standards were well below average in mathematics. This was primarily due to the abilities of the particular year group and standards for that year were not typical for the school. Standards in 2013 are back to average. Relatively, reading was the weakest area of performance. More challenging reading books have been purchased and pupils now have opportunities to read daily. These changes are having a good effect on pupils' learning.
- Equality of opportunity is promoted well and there is no significant difference in the performance of groups. Pupils entitled to the pupil premium funding attained well in the national tests in 2013. The small number of pupils who are looked after by the local authority performed better than their peers by the end of Year 2 in all areas. The small number of pupils who were known to be eligible for free school meals attained better than their peers nationally in all subjects by the end of Year 6. Current information on pupils' progress shows that pupils known to be eligible for free school meals are one term behind in their progress in writing and nearly two terms in reading and mathematics, in comparison to pupils who are not known to be eligible for free school meals. These gaps are closing.
- Disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs achieve well because they have specific plans, with targets that are matched to their needs and they receive extra support from adults to help them to catch-up in their learning. The small numbers of pupils from mixed backgrounds achieve well.
- The most-able pupils did not attain well in 2013. They reached standards below those of similar pupils in schools nationally by the end of Year 2 and by the end of Year 6 in all areas. The school recognises this as a key area to develop.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Parents say that their children are taught well and inspection findings agree with this view. Teachers very much enjoy teaching and relationships between staff and pupils are very secure. These features have a positive impact on pupils' well-being, as well as on their learning. Lessons

are fast paced so pupils are focused and listen carefully. Teachers have good subject knowledge and they use this to question pupils to develop their understanding and learning well. For example, in a Key Stage 1 mathematics lesson, pupils were solving word problems and were asked, 'How many toes are on two pairs of feet?' This promoted some effective discussion.

- Pupils very much enjoy the opportunities they have to take a lead in their own learning and to work in groups. This was seen in a Key Stage 2 English lesson, where pupils were working well in small groups to extend and develop their vocabulary by using a key word the teacher had provided for them. Pupils were focused on their learning and tried to find as many words as they could that extended the original key word.
- Support staff are skilled and work well with pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs, both in and out of the classroom. Consequently, these pupils make good progress.
- Homework is set on a regular basis and supports learning well.
- Teachers use assessment information to plan activities for the different abilities of pupils in their classes. For example, in a Key Stage 2 mathematics lesson, pupils were solving number problems. The most able had an additional twist to their problem because once they had found out how many aliens there were they then had to think about what would happen if the different types of aliens were doubled. This provided a good level of challenge. However, the most able pupils are not challenged in all lessons. For example, in a Key Stage 2 English lesson, pupils were given pictures and they had to use different types of words to describe the picture. There was no specific direction for the most able pupils. This slowed the progress they made.
- Teachers provide very helpful feedback to pupils when they mark their writing. As a result, pupils know what it is they need to do to improve. However, this quality of marking is not always seen in other subjects, such as mathematics, and as a result, not all pupils are clear about what to do next to improve.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils behave well and have positive attitudes to their learning. In this small school, staff know pupils and their families well. Staff show a good level of care and work successfully to develop pupils' good well-being. As a result, pupils hold their teachers in high regard and comments such as, 'Everyone is kind' and 'Staff help you' are typical.
- Pupils whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable receive the support that they need with their personal development. For example, some of the pupil premium funding is used to provide additional support to meet the social and emotional needs of these pupils.
- Assemblies help to recognise and celebrate the individual talents that pupils have, as well as exploring with pupils how these individual talents can be used to help others. This impacts well on pupils' social and moral development.
- Pupils sometimes need gentle reminders to ensure they do what is being asked of them. They respond to this well and conform very quickly. Any misbehaviour is carefully recorded and addressed. Pupils say that when bullying occurs occasionally, it is dealt with by staff. There have been no racist incidents and no pupil has been excluded. Pupils say that if they had any concerns or worries they would feel very comfortable in discussing these with an adult in school.
- Pupils feel safe in school and have a good understanding of how to keep safe in different situations. They know that they should not speak to strangers when using the internet. Pupils recognise the importance of fire drills in school and they develop a good understanding of safety when they visit locations away from school.
- There are good opportunities for pupils to be responsible. For example, Junior Safety Officers speak to pupils about road and fire safety in assembly. Gardeners are involved in planting and making sure that the environment is tidy. The school council are involved in fund raising, for example, supporting the food bank. Pupils also help to sell toast and milkshakes at break times.
- Pupils and parents alike greatly enjoy the opportunities they have to work with one another. This was seen during the 'Christmas Draw' afternoon where parents made Christmas cards and decorations with their children.

- Attendance is average.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides good leadership and has a clear plan for how to take the school forward. She has the support of both the governing body and parents. All staff work well as a team and are highly supportive of one another. Comments such as, 'We have a committed staff who work hard to support each other' were typical from teachers during the inspection.
- The good achievement and teaching since the last inspection has been sustained. The school has made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The quality in teachers' marking particularly in writing has improved so that pupils know what it is they need to do next to improve their work. Pupils are given opportunities to take a lead in their own learning and work collaboratively in lessons.
- The school development plan identifies the correct priorities to improve the school further.
- Assessment and the tracking of pupils' progress have improved since the last inspection. Pupils are assessed regularly and pupils' progress meetings are held with all teachers to discuss those not making the expected progress. Hence, teachers are accountable for the progress of pupils in their class.
- Teaching is observed regularly and areas for improvement are identified. Teachers access training to ensure that their strong practice is maintained and develops further. Almost all staff have changed the year groups they teach in order to refresh their skills and ensure on-going improvements.
- Parents are very satisfied with the work of the school. Parents are invited to class assemblies, newsletters are sent home and there are specific themed events for parents. The school website is currently being developed.
- The local authority knows that the school is running well and hence provides, 'light touch' support. The Link Officer is new to the role and has checked the quality of assessments in the Reception class.
- The new Primary School Sports funding is used to develop the expertise of staff in dance so that they can lead this area effectively. Additional sports equipment is being purchased and the residential visit which has a focus on adventurous activities is subsidised for pupils.
- The curriculum is topic based because school leaders want to make learning relevant for pupils. The curriculum is adapted so that there are varied and interesting starting points for pupils' writing. For example, pupils learnt to play a simple violin piece and then performed alongside other schools in a concert, an experience about which they then wrote. A range of visitors including scientists, nurses and the local police, enrich the curriculum well. Visits outside school, for example, to the synagogue and mosque also support pupils well in understanding different cultures.
- Staff with responsibility for leading curriculum subjects are very keen to do the best they can. However, they are not all sufficiently rigorous in carrying out their roles. Namely, they do not check closely enough and measure the progress that pupils make in their individual subjects. This hinders leaders in being able to help pupils to achieve even more.
- Safeguarding meets requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors enjoy their roles and are passionate about the school and pupils. All governors are linked to key aspects of the school's work, for example, literacy, numeracy and safeguarding. They contribute to the school's evaluation of its own performance, they review policies and ensure that priorities in the school development plan are implemented. Governors challenge when appropriate, for example, in relation to attendance, pupils' progress and to finances. They have a good understanding of the quality of teaching, contribute to the performance management of the headteacher and know that teachers are continuing to improve their practice through training. Governors understand achievement and know what the school needs to focus on to bring about further improvement. Governors know that the pupil

premium funding is being used for staffing and that this is having a positive impact on the achievement of the pupils for whom it is intended. Governors attend training when necessary, for example, in relation to achievement and child protection. Finances are in good order.

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	111244
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	430518

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	77
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kathleen Williams
Headteacher	Gillian Threadgold
Date of previous school inspection	29 May 2012
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