

Birch Hill Primary School

Leppington, Bracknell, RG12 7WW

Inspection dates 28–29 November 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:

- Teaching is inconsistent and not enough is good or better. Some teachers do not ask probing questions or keep track of how well pupils are learning during lessons. They do not adapt the tasks or explanations quickly enough.
- The progress of pupils in mathematics is inconsistent across the school because they do not reinforce and use their skills widely enough. Too few pupils reach the highest levels.
- The use of phonics (the linking of letters and the sounds they make) is not consistent enough and is not always pitched at the level pupils need.
- Marking is not always effective because comments do not always tell pupils what to improve and pupils get too few opportunities to respond to it.
- Pupils have too few opportunities to decide for themselves what they need to learn next. Consequently they rely too much on the adults around them.
- Teachers who lead aspects of the school do not always make sure that improvements happen rapidly enough. Neither do they use data well enough to check how effective each improvement has been.

The school has the following strengths:

- Pupils make good progress in reading; they read confidently. Progress in writing has also improved and is mostly good.
- Most inadequate teaching has been tackled and has improved. In the best lessons, pupils learn well because work is challenging and they are helped to know if they have succeeded in their learning.
- Senior leaders set a good example of what they expect of teachers. This is increasingly shared and understood by other leaders.
- Pupils are very polite and well behaved around the school, or when on trips. Pupils feel safe at school, and get along happily. Inspectors found that they know how to keep themselves safe.
- Members of the governing body, along with senior leaders, have improved their understanding of what data show about the performance of pupils. They make sure all the statutory requirements, including those for keeping pupils safe, are met.

Information about this inspection

- Three inspectors visited the school for two days. During this time they observed 33 lessons taken by 16 teachers, as well as sessions led by teaching assistants. About a quarter of these observations were carried out together with senior leaders.
- The inspectors spoke to groups of pupils, staff and governors, and spoke to parents and carers informally. A wide range of pupils' work was reviewed, during lessons and as examples of work over time. Some of the review of pupils' work was carried out with senior leaders.
- Inspectors considered school documentation provided by the school, and reviewed the procedures and records showing the progress pupils have made. Minutes from meetings, including governors' meetings, were reviewed. The lead inspector spoke to a representative of the local authority by telephone.
- The inspectors considered the 36 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, as well as correspondence received during the inspection. Inspectors spoke informally to parents and carers before and after school. The responses to a survey for staff were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Andrew Saunders, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jan Edwards	Additional Inspector
Anne Stopforth	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average size primary school which has two classes in each year group. There is also a nursery.
- Most pupils are White British. Other pupils come from a wide range of different ethnic backgrounds. A very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who benefit from additional support for their achievement through the pupil premium is below average. This funding is allocated by the government to make sure schools promote the achievement of groups of pupils who may face disadvantages. They include pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children looked after by the local authority, as well as children of families serving in the armed forces. The school currently has no pupils in the latter category.
- There is an inclusion unit on the site, which is run by the local authority, for pupils with behavioural needs from across the wider area. These pupils are not on the roll of the school and this unit was not part of the inspection.
- The school meets the current floor standards, which are the government's minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils at the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that teaching is consistently good and that more is outstanding, by:
 - using probing questioning to check pupils' understanding more thoroughly during lessons and then using this information to adapt the tasks pupils are expected to do
 - checking that teachers are confident about the subject content they are teaching to pupils, including the accuracy of sounds when they teach phonics at all levels
 - making sure that pupils in all classes benefit from helpful comments about the work they have done in their books, and that they have the opportunity to respond to these comments.
- Increase the consistency of progress in mathematics across the school, by:
 - increasing the opportunities for more-able pupils to work at the highest levels and to get on with their work independently
 - developing pupils' confidence in their core mathematical skills, giving them more opportunities to use and apply these in a range of situations.
- Improve pupils' understanding of how they can take responsibility for their own learning, by:
 - making sure adults do not do too much for pupils
 - getting pupils to decide for themselves when they have reached the targets they have been set, and what they need to do next in their learning.
- Ensure that teachers who lead aspects of the school share more fully the responsibility for bringing about rapid improvements in teaching and pupils' progress, using data to check how effective each improvement has been.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The progress of pupils across the school is inconsistent, particularly in mathematics. This means that while most pupils reach the expected levels, fewer pupils than average reach the higher levels. The progress of all pupils requires improvement, although it is better in reading and writing than in mathematics.
- Some pupils lack confidence in their core mathematical skills and knowledge, particularly when working on practical tasks, or when they need to use mathematics in other situations. Recent improvements have strengthened the teaching of mathematics, but this is not yet fully embedded and the impact on the data is not yet evident.
- More-able pupils are not always challenged enough and, considering their starting points when they join the school, their progress requires improvement. They often make up ground in Year 6, but have had too few opportunities to work at the highest levels before Year 6. Therefore it is hard for these pupils to be able to reach the levels they are capable of. Overall the standards reached at the end of Key Stage 2 are average.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 have been rising, and in 2013 were above average. More pupils than average met the required standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1. Pupils currently in Year 2 are working at lower standards and have considerable ground to make up to achieve similar standards.
- Pupils join the school with skills and knowledge which are at least in line with those expected for their age, and often better. They enjoy the activities and resources available in the Nursery and Reception classes, quickly developing confidence in identifying letters and numbers, and in speaking and listening. By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, many are already working at higher than expected levels for their age. However, the more-able pupils are occasionally expected to sit through explanations or rehearsal of sounds and letters they are already fully confident with and this inhibits their progress.
- The progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs requires improvement. The inconsistency of some of the teaching they have had in the past has left some of these pupils with skills and knowledge which are not securely developed. Changes to the way support is provided for these pupils have been implemented and are beginning to have an impact and data are being used more effectively to track their progress.
- During lessons, pupils who speak English as an additional language are well supported by well-trained adults, as well as by other pupils who make every effort to help these pupils learn new words. As a result, these pupils quickly develop confidence in communicating.
- In 2013, pupils in Year 6 who were eligible for support through the pupil premium reached standards which were above those of other pupils in the school. However, across the school this is not always typical, and other pupils supported through this funding are about three months behind other pupils in their year group. The progress of these pupils requires improvement.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is not yet consistently good, and there is too little outstanding teaching. There has been an increase in the training for teachers to understand how to make sure learning is effective. This means that inadequate teaching is now rare.
- A few teachers do not expect enough of the pupils in their class, and in some lessons the pace falters when teachers are unsure of the content they are teaching, including in phonics for more-able pupils.
- While pupils in some classes know what targets they are aiming for in English and mathematics, others have only limited opportunities to think for themselves whether they have achieved their targets, and some targets do not stretch the pupils fully.

- Occasionally teachers do not ask pupils searching questions to check how well they have understood a subject. Sometimes teachers do not recognise that pupils already understand what they need to do.
- Marking in pupils' books is not always effective, because pupils do not get enough time or the encouragement to respond to teachers' written comments.
- Teaching assistants are usually well informed about the needs of the particular pupils they are supporting, and some have specialist training for this. However at times teachers and teaching assistants help pupils too readily and pupils do not have enough time to grapple with what they are learning or to think hard for themselves.
- In the most effective lessons, pupils think about what they have previously done, help the teacher to decide on the criteria which will help them know if they have been successful, and then evaluate their progress towards this. For example, in an effective Year 6 English lesson pupils considered their use of formal language in writing a report about the Victorians, and gave each other thoughtful feedback to improve their work further. These pupils made good progress in their writing.
- Pupils enjoy the topics around which teachers plan their work and homework projects are well-organised and interesting. This helps to develop pupils' independence in learning more widely.

The behaviour and safety of pupils require improvement

- At times, pupils rely too much on adults to remind them what they should be doing and are not always ready to learn. Some pupils become restless when the tasks they are set are not challenging or when teachers spend too long explaining things pupils already know. Occasionally teachers have to stop the lesson and deal with this low level of disruption, which interrupts the learning of other pupils.
- The peer mentors help to sort out any situations where pupils may fall out with one another during break times. However, pupils did feel that there were occasions when a few pupils were silly during lessons and that this sometimes slowed their learning.
- Pupils said that some bullying did occur last year, but that the school council and adults in the school worked together to make sure it stopped. They feel confident that it would always be dealt with if they brought it to someone's attention.
- Pupils like being at school, and attendance is average. The school makes sure pupils and families understand the importance of being at school regularly.
- Outside of lessons, pupils are polite and well behaved. They enjoy making the most of the wide range of facilities and opportunities they have within the grounds of the school, including the wildlife area. Pupils say that most pupils are well behaved most of the time.
- Pupils feel safe at the school because the environment is carefully looked after and well maintained. Pupils have good opportunities to learn how to keep themselves safe, including when they use the internet. Consequently pupils feel confident about keeping themselves safe and there is always an adult available if they need to discuss anything.

The leadership and management require improvement

- Senior leaders have clarified their vision of what is expected of teachers and this is now being more widely shared with those who lead key aspects of the school. However, some of these middle leaders are new to their roles and their actions are not yet fully evident in the data or the teaching seen.
- Senior leaders check the quality of teaching and the progress pupils are making through lesson observations, although the results of these have been too optimistic at times.
- There is an increasing emphasis on discussing data on how pupils are doing and teachers are now held more often to account for the progress of pupils in their class. However this is developing and the impact on pupils' data is only beginning to be evident.

- Senior leaders have become more effective in challenging teachers to demonstrate how they are performing above expectations in order to justify any additional pay they are awarded. Members of the governing body help to support senior leaders in making sure this shows good value for money.
- The additional funding to support pupils eligible for the pupil premium is used to make sure pupils get additional opportunities to develop their reading, speaking and listening, and social skills. The school has been successful in narrowing the gap, but it has not yet been closed in all year groups.
- The topics around which teachers plan their lessons are enriched through various trips the pupils go on, and pupils greatly enjoy the extra opportunities available outside of their lessons. For example, Year 6 pupils last year undertook an ambitious and successful project to perform two Shakespearian plays at a festival. Many parents and carers commented about how the school enables pupils to have a wide experience of the world around them. However, the curriculum does not yet give more-able pupils the opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge to a higher level.
- Teachers who lead the particular subject areas of the school are developing their confidence in evaluating the quality of teaching within their areas, and then providing appropriate support to help other teachers improve.
- Parents and carers feel that they get valuable support from the school, including about how to help their children's learning at home, for example with phonics. Almost all parents and carers feel that teachers and leaders are very approachable and caring, and that any issues they raise are resolved quickly.
- Senior leaders and members of the governing body make sure that the requirements for keeping pupils safe are met, and that adults working with pupils are safe to do so. They have developed good links with other partners to make sure pupils get any support they may need.
- With the reduction in inadequate teaching and the rise in standards at Key Stage 1 and improving standards at the end of Key Stage 2, the school has the capacity to continue making improvements.
- The local authority has provided the school with a good level of support to overcome the issues it faced previously and has helped the school to check that the teachers' views about the standard of work pupils are doing at different ages are accurate. The school is developing greater independence and confidence in doing this for itself.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are increasingly challenging the school to explain how the performance of pupils fits within a wider context nationally. They ask the school to provide more explicit detail about the impact that improvements are having. They recognise that in the past the governing body has too readily accepted an optimistic view about the work of the school. Now they are wary of being complacent, and they continue looking for ways to help the school improve. Members of the governing body regularly spend time in school finding out the views of pupils, teachers and parents and carers. They check the information the headteacher has given them and gather some of their own evidence. Changes in the governing body have meant that governors have undertaken training to increase their understanding of the data. They fully understand their responsibilities with regard to keeping pupils safe. Along with senior leaders, their view of teaching has been a bit too optimistic at times, but this has improved and it is now more closely linked to the progress pupils are making, in order to inform decisions about teachers' pay and leadership.
 - Members of the governing body make sure that the finances of the school are spent carefully and that funding, for example the pupil premium, benefits the pupils it is intended for. They hold the headteacher to account for improvements.

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	109893
Local authority	Bracknell Forest
Inspection number	426361

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	420
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Darren Burgess
Headteacher	Alan Harding
Date of previous school inspection	8–9 November 2011
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