

# Powers Hall Infant School

Spa Road, Witham, CM8 1NA

## Inspection dates

14–15 January 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	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.

- Pupils achieve well in writing and mathematics and do particularly well in reading. Standards at the end of 2013 were above average and, this year, pupils in Key Stage 1 are continuing to make good progress.
- Well-planned activities in the Nursery and Reception classes give children a good start to school life and they make good progress.
- Teaching is good and some is outstanding. Tasks build on what pupils already know and move them forward in their learning.
- Teachers ask searching questions which help pupils think carefully about what they are learning and how they can improve.
- Behaviour is good, both in lessons and around school. Pupils are polite and aware of the importance of getting on well with others.
- Pupils know how to stay safe in different situations. They say they feel safe in school and there is always someone to go to if they have a problem.
- The school is led and managed well. Pupils' progress is regularly checked and any in danger of falling behind are quickly helped to keep up.
- The governors know how well the school is doing because they ask challenging questions in meetings and visit the school to check on its progress.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Very occasionally in lessons, pupils do not have time to complete enough work.
- While some teachers give extremely good guidance to pupils as to how they can improve, others do not make clear to pupils the next steps they need to take to move their learning on.
- There is a good range of activities to learn outdoors, but they are not always planned carefully enough to develop pupils' skills and knowledge as effectively as the indoor learning.
- Some leaders are new to their posts and so have not yet developed all the skills they need to lead in their areas.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 23 lessons or parts of lessons, nine of which were seen together with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other staff, three groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor, a school improvement consultant and a representative of the local authority.
- Informal discussions were held with parents and carers.
- The inspectors took account of the 24 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), the school's own parent questionnaires and 18 completed staff questionnaires.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's checks on its performance, its analysis and tracking of pupils' progress, records of behaviour and safety, school improvement plans, records relating to classroom observations and the management of staff performance, safeguarding arrangements and records of meetings of the governing body.
- They also looked at pupils' work, listened to pupils read and checked information on pupils' attendance.

## Inspection team

Susan Hughes, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Ken Parry

Additional Inspector

Susan Cox

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium is above average. This is additional funding for certain groups such as pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, have a parent in the armed forces or are in local authority care.
- The proportions of pupils from ethnic minority groups and those who speak English as an additional language are below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above average.
- The school provides specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs. Its speech, language and communication unit takes up to 10 pupils.
- The leaders responsible for disabled pupils, special educational needs and literacy took up post in September 2013, though they were already working in the school prior to that.
- Three new members of teaching staff started in January 2014.

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

- Strengthen leadership and management by ensuring that all leaders develop the skills they need to check progress, provide guidance for colleagues and drive improvements in the areas for which they are responsible.
  
- Improve teaching so that more is outstanding by ensuring that:
  - in lessons, pupils have enough time in lessons to complete their work
  - marking in books gives pupils clear guidance on what they need to do to improve and teachers check that pupils follow the advice they are given
  - outdoor activities extend learning as well as those indoors.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Children typically join the Nursery with skills lower than those expected for their age. They make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes and start Key Stage 1 with skills much closer to those expected. A higher proportion of children in this year's Reception classes attended the school's Nursery and their skills are better developed than in previous years.
- While the results of the most recent Year 1 national screening check on how well pupils know phonics (the sounds that letters represent in words) were below average, pupils in Year 2 left the school with well above-average standards in reading. Changes to the way phonics are taught mean that pupils are now more confident in sounding out unfamiliar words. For example, during the inspection, Year 1 pupils used their phonic knowledge to read 'mammoth' 'spaceman' and 'juggling'.
- Standards in writing and mathematics were above average at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2013. School data and work in books show that pupils have made good progress since September and most are working at a level above that expected for their age.
- More-able pupils also make good progress and are working well above the level expected for their age, especially in reading and writing. They read fluently and with expression. Phonic skills are used well to write well-constructed stories.
- Pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. While their writing and mathematics attainment is nearly two terms behind other pupils in Year 1, the good progress they make as they move through the school means that this gap has narrowed by the end of Year 2. School data shows there is no difference in the attainment in reading of these pupils and other pupils currently in Year 2. The pupil premium funding is used for small-group and individual support where needed to make sure that any pupils falling behind are quickly helped to catch up.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. A wide range of support is provided within lessons, and in small groups or individual help out of the classroom. Some pupils attend the speech, language and communications unit each morning, where the teaching is tailored to meet each individual's specific needs so that they all make good progress. They join the rest of the school for the afternoon sessions, where sensitive and skilled support of teachers and other adults helps them to continue to thrive.
- Pupils make good progress in physical education. Their skills are developed through well-taught lessons and good use of specialist sports coaches. During the inspection, very high-quality physical education and dance lessons were observed. A range of sports and multi-skills clubs give pupils extra opportunities to develop their skills and physical well-being.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good because pupils are given work that is at the right level to help them to develop skills and knowledge, whatever their ability. The questions teachers ask make pupils think carefully about their learning. Teachers then follow these up with more searching questions to help pupils develop their understanding. For example, pupils finding shapes around the room were able to describe them using appropriate mathematical language in response to the teacher's probing questions.

- In the Nursery and Reception classes, a wide range of activities helps children to develop the skills they need. There is a balance between learning that is led by an adult and opportunities for children to explore and practise skills for themselves. For example, balls with the phonic sounds that children had learnt with the teacher were hidden in a sand tray for them to find and read.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are all well supported. They receive a good balance of small-group and whole-class teaching, and some benefit from high-quality specialist teaching in the speech, language and communications unit. Additional adults in the classroom are well briefed and provide sensitive and appropriate help whilst encouraging pupils to be able to work without support.
- Pupils who receive help from the pupil premium are supported in small groups or on a one-to-one basis as needed. The funding is also used to ensure that pupils are able to participate in other activities and clubs which support their learning.
- Pupils have extremely positive attitudes to learning. They are keen to share their work and are proud of what they have done. Lessons often involve pupils talking to each in 'talk partner' sessions, and pupils show good social skills as they listen and respond to each other's ideas.
- There is a good variety of indoor and outdoor activities, especially in the Nursery and Reception classes. However, these are not always used as effectively as they could be. For example, while writing and mark-making activities are well promoted and encouraged inside, opportunities to develop these skills in the outdoor areas are fewer and not always promoted as much, which means that pupils do not use them as effectively to develop their skills.
- In most lessons, teachers make sure that no time is wasted and pupils have plenty of opportunity to learn and practise their skills. Very occasionally, however, organisational issues such as changing from one lesson to another, tidying away or getting equipment ready for the next lesson eat into the lesson itself and means that pupils do not have enough time to complete their work.
- The school policy for marking books aims to identify the next step that pupils must take to improve. In some classes, the advice provided by the teachers is very clear, but in others, comments, such as 'keep trying hard' or 'keep going' are too vague to be helpful. Teachers do not all ensure that pupils act on the advice they are given through marking.

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

- The behaviour of pupils is good. It has improved considerably since the last inspection because rewards and sanctions are consistently applied and understood by all pupils. As a consequence, they behave well in lesson and around school. They are polite, move around the school calmly and respond well to the good role models around them.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils have a good understanding of what bullying is and its different forms, such as physical, name-calling and hurting feelings. They are confident that any problems in school are always sorted out by an adult. They feel safe in school and all the parents who responded to Parent View agreed that their children are well looked after. While a few parents have expressed some concerns, school questionnaires show that most parents feel behaviour is good and bullying dealt with well. No-one who responded to Parent View felt that bullying was not dealt with effectively.

- Playtimes are very active and pupils have a plenty of toys to play with. However, they are very conscious of the need to be aware of others so that no-one gets hurt. The school council led an assembly about this and talked about using the equipment safely. Pupils also recalled visits of fire fighters, who talked to them about fire safety and making emergency calls.
- Behaviour in lessons is good. Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning and are usually engrossed in what they are doing. Occasionally, time is wasted when clearing away or changing lessons, but disruption to lessons is rare.
- The school works very closely with parents to ensure that pupils attend regularly. While there are still some pupils whose attendance is not as good as it should be, overall attendance has improved recently and is currently in line with the national average.

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

- The strong leadership by the headteacher and senior leaders is evident in the good progress, standards and quality of teaching in the school.
- Pupils' progress is checked regularly. Subject leaders analyse data to make sure that any pupils in danger of falling behind are quickly helped to keep up. Class teachers are all held accountable for the progress their pupils make. The appraisal system for checking teachers' performance, introduced last year, contributes to the good teaching. Individual targets are used by senior leaders and the governing body to measure whether pay rises and promotion are justified by results. Teachers and support staff say that they have good training opportunities to develop and refine their skills.
- While some leaders are new to their roles and have not yet had the opportunity to develop the skills they need to drive improvement, they are being supported well by established members of the team.
- The curriculum is planned well to meet the needs of all pupils, including the most able, and disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. It is taught through themes which are chosen by the pupils themselves, and includes practical experiences which enthuse pupils and makes them keen to learn. The school rigorously promotes equality of opportunity, tackles discrimination to ensure that all pupils achieve well.
- Physical education is taught well. Specialist coaches are employed by the school to run clubs and help teachers develop their own skills so that they can teach high-quality physical education lessons. Expertise is shared across a group of local schools, and this also provides opportunities for pupils to work together and learn new skills.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. Social skills are developed through such activities and 'Friendship Friday' and the award of pompoms for those who show care for others. Signs around the school encourage pupils to 'fill a bucket' with pompoms. The school 'well-being project' enables pupils to use a sum of money to facilitate fundraising for their chosen charity, broadening their understanding of the needs of others.
- The local authority has provided minimal support but ensured that the school knew what it needed to do to improve. Since the last inspection, it has checked regularly on how well the school is doing.

**■ The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is ably led by the Chair of Governors. She has encouraged attendance at training sessions and ensured that all governors play an active part in checking how well the school is doing through asking challenging questions of the senior leaders and visiting the school. The governors know how the system for appraising and setting targets for teachers contributes to the quality of teaching and they use school data to check that pupils continue to make good progress. They ensure that teachers' pay rises are linked to the progress their pupils make. Governors know how the pupil premium funding is spent and regularly check that pupils are benefiting from it by making progress that will close any gaps in attainment between them and other pupils. They are less clear about how the new primary sports funding is being spent. Governors have made sure that national requirements for safeguarding and child protection are fully met.

## 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>	114944
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	431617

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Infant
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–7
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	283
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Gemma Ford
<b>Headteacher</b>	Claire Jaques
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 September 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01376 512605
<b>Fax number</b>	01376 512605
<b>Email address</b>	admin@powershall-inf.essex.sch.uk

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