

Little Digmaor Primary School

Abbeystead, Skelmersdale, Lancashire, WN8 9NF

Inspection dates 14–15 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- In recent years, not enough pupils have made good progress in writing and mathematics, especially the most able pupils.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to write at length across a range of subjects in order to develop their writing skills at a faster pace.
- Pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammatical skills are not as good as they should be.
- Pupils have too few opportunities to apply their mathematical skills to solving problems.
- Although teaching is improving rapidly, its quality is still somewhat uneven. Not enough is outstanding.
- Some teaching does not get the level of challenge right for different groups of pupils. Work for the most able pupils is sometimes not hard enough.
- Sometimes teachers do not check thoroughly enough in lessons that all pupils understand what they are meant to be doing. This leads to some confusion and slows progress.
- The pace of some teaching is not always fast enough to keep all pupils fully engaged in their learning.

The school has the following strengths

- Strong leadership and management, including governance, are driving the school rapidly forward after a period of some decline.
- The quality of teaching and pupils' achievement are improving rapidly. The proportion of good teaching has increased significantly.
- Most pupils enjoy reading and read well.
- The care, guidance and support provided for pupils and their families are of a very high standard.
- Attendance has improved significantly.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils are well-mannered and considerate and feel safe. The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning on eight occasions taught by four teachers and the learning mentor. The inspector observed the teaching of reading and spelling. He also listened to a group of Year 2 pupils read.
- The inspector held meetings with senior and middle leaders and managers, pupils, three members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and two representatives from the local authority. The inspector also met with a parent at the parent's request.
- The inspector took account of a wide range of documentation including: data relating to pupils' achievement; a summary of the school's view of its own performance ; the school improvement plan; records of checks on teaching and learning; records and policies relating to behaviour and safety; minutes of meetings of the governing body and local authority reports on the school's effectiveness.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View, to give an overview. However, the inspector took account of results from surveys sent out by the school to parents over the last two years. The inspector also took account of 13 questionnaires returned by members of staff.

Inspection team

Stephen Wall, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Little Digmoor is much smaller than most primary schools across the country.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well-above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those 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.
- Almost all pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well-above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards that set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- Pupils are taught in four mixed-age, mixed-ability classes. The number of pupils in each year group varies considerably from as low as four to a maximum of 15.
- After a lengthy period of quite considerable disruption to staffing and to the leadership of the school, the situation has stabilised following the arrival of the new headteacher who joined the school in April 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make all teaching at least good with more that is outstanding to raise achievement further by:
 - making sure that the level of challenge, especially for the most able pupils, is always high enough
 - ensuring that the pace of teaching is always fast enough to keep pupils interested and alert at all times
 - checking rigorously that all pupils understand fully how to tackle the tasks that teachers set for them and are clear about what the teacher expects.
- Improve pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics further so that more pupils make good progress by:
 - providing pupils with more opportunities to write creatively and at length across a range of different subjects
 - improving pupils' basic skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar
 - making sure that pupils, especially the most able, have more opportunities to apply their mathematical skills to solving problems.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because in recent years, while the vast majority of pupils have made steady progress, not enough pupils have made good progress in writing and mathematics, especially the most able pupils. Despite recent improvement, this continues to be the case because:
 - pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their writing skills by writing at length across a range of different subjects
 - teaching pays too little attention to developing pupils' skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar
 - in mathematics, pupils do not routinely apply their skills to solving problems which limits the pace at which their numeracy skills and understanding develop.
- Despite these relative weaknesses, pupils are now making much better progress than previously because the quality of teaching is much better and leadership has set an agenda based on a set of much higher expectations.
- For example, good teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1 has transformed pupils' achievement and attitudes rapidly and successfully. The majority of pupils are now making rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics where previously it had been too slow.
- In Key Stage 2, the rate of pupils' progress is somewhat uneven because the quality of teaching, although improving, remains variable.
- Nonetheless, in 2013 the attainment of Year 6 pupils in the national tests rose sharply to be close to the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Nearly all pupils made the progress expected of them from their individual starting points and a larger number than in previous years did better than this.
- The most able pupils generally make steady progress. The proportion making good progress is, however, not yet as high it should be because teaching is not always challenging enough for them and they bring with them a legacy of slower progress and low expectations caused by the disruption to teaching and leadership in the past.
- Pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals generally achieve as well as their classmates. The gap in their attainment has closed rapidly in recent years because leadership has given a much sharper focus to using pupil premium funding effectively. The 2013 Year 6 national test results show that in mathematics and reading the attainment of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals was above the national average for similar pupils and in line with other pupils in the school. In writing, attainment was equal to the national figure but below other pupils in the school by approximately one half of a National Curriculum level. Despite this, the gap in writing narrowed significantly in 2013.
- Pupils who are disabled or with special educational needs generally achieve well as they move up through the school because of the strong support and intervention that they receive.
- Reading is promoted well. Phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) are taught effectively. Pupils enjoy reading. Their skills in reading have improved significantly.
- The improving picture of achievement for most groups of pupils shows the school's success in promoting equality of opportunity and tackling any discrimination. Leadership is very aware of the need to make sure that the needs of the most able are met and planning is explicit in its range of initiatives to make sure this happens.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although teaching is improving rapidly, it requires improvement because its quality is variable, especially in Key Stage 2, and not enough is consistently outstanding.

- Teaching does not always get the level of challenge right, especially for the most able. In a Key Stage 2 mathematics lesson, for example, the most able pupils quickly finished a set of calculations to be then given a set of problems to complete that were too simple. This did not stretch their thinking sufficiently.
- Sometimes the pace of teaching is too slow and pupils become restless. This too hinders progress at times.
- Occasionally, pupils start work on the tasks that the teacher has set for them without fully understanding what they are meant to be doing because the teacher has not checked their readiness to tackle them. This means that pupils are not in a position to give of their best and are sometimes overawed by the demands made of them.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1 has improved significantly and is good. It enables children to make good progress from their generally low starting points when they arrive.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, knowledgeable and well-planned teaching provides children with a good range of indoor and outdoor activities that stimulate children's learning and gets them off to a good start to their time in school.
- In the Key Stage 1 class, the teacher has very good subject knowledge that makes sure that the children's needs by age and ability are fully met. In a mathematics lesson, for example, the fastest learners worked with the class teacher on challenging number problems while another group worked with the teaching assistant on more basic tasks to reinforce their grasp of numbers one to twenty. A small group of younger pupils chose from a variety of more simple number activities, such as fishing numbered balls out of a tank of water. Every pupil made good progress.
- Despite some inconsistency, the quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 is improving rapidly. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated and, where teaching requires improvement, support and training are having a positive effect. The school's own records of the checks made, supported by observations during the inspection and the quality of work in pupils' books, testify to the improvement that strong leadership is bringing about.
- Despite some relative weaknesses in the teaching of literacy and numeracy, especially in challenging the most able pupils, pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics is improving rapidly and securely.
- A very strong, well-trained and able team of teaching assistants play a pivotal role in supporting pupils who are slower learners through in-class support and in one-to-one interventions outside the classroom.
- Teachers mark pupils' books regularly. Their comments in pupils' books are usually of good quality in showing pupils what they need to do to improve their work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are polite and well-mannered. They play together without squabbling. They treat each other, the adults working with them and visitors respectfully. 'Please', 'thank you' and 'you're welcome' are part and parcel of everyday life in the school.
- Pupils say that behaviour in lessons and around school has improved a lot. 'We can get on with our work much better because the teachers don't have to spend as much time sorting out silliness', was a telling comment from an older pupil.
- Pupils generally have positive attitudes to learning in lessons. However, where the pace of teaching is too slow or they do not fully understand what they are meant to be doing, some pupils react by being silly or chatting idly with their classmates.
- The improving picture of behaviour is underpinned by initiatives such as STEPS that sets out clearly what is unacceptable behaviour and the consequences of poor behaviour. This is much valued by pupils and by many parents, some of whom keep a copy pinned on the fridge at home to act as help and guidance when their children behave badly.

- The nurture class that is led by the learning mentor for pupils who are vulnerable or who find it difficult to curb their own behaviour is also pivotal in teaching pupils how to manage their own behaviour and ready themselves for learning in lessons.
- Pupils say that bullying of any kind is very rare. School records confirm this. Pupils say that they are fully confident in approaching staff if they have a problem and that everything will be done to help them solve it.
- Attendance has improved rapidly over the last 18 months and is now average because of the clear messages sent to parents about its importance and the tight rein that is kept on tracking patterns of absence.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils say that they feel very safe and secure in school.
- Policies and procedures for safeguarding are fully in place. Governors review health and safety matters and policies regularly. All staff receive regular training in safeguarding.
- In discussion, pupils show that they are very aware of potentially dangerous situations and how to avoid or deal with them. This includes good knowledge of the dangers presented by the internet.
- The vast majority of parents have no concerns about behaviour or safety at the school.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, has rejuvenated the school. He has set a clear agenda for the future success of the school based on high expectations. There is a razor-sharp focus on improving the quality of teaching and raising standards. The actions taken so far such as increasing the rigour with which the quality of teaching is checked on and the much more effective use of information to track pupils' progress are having the desired effect.
- In restoring the school to good health, the headteacher is also restoring parental confidence in the school.
- Leadership knows what the school does well and is clear about where it could do better. The high-quality school development plan sets out clearly how further improvement is to be achieved.
- Teachers have welcomed having extra responsibilities to manage specific subject areas. They know what is expected of them and support fully the agenda for improvement. Teamwork in pursuit of this is strong.
- The headteacher has sharpened procedures for managing the performance of staff. There is now a clear link between the progress that pupils make in classes to appraisal and promotion up the teachers' salary scale.
- Both the headteacher and governing body ensure that the school's finances are used to best effect. This includes the allocation of pupil premium funding that has a sharp focus on improving the achievement of those eligible pupils. Similarly, primary school sports funding is used wisely to buy in outside expertise to train staff in improving their skills in physical education. Plans are in place to extend the range of sports for children with the inclusion of, for example, archery and karate.
- The curriculum meets most pupils' needs, although not fully provided for the most able pupils. Topic work is very popular with the pupils who are included in its planning. However, opportunities for using topic work to support pupils' writing and numeracy skills are not fully exploited. The school provides a good range of popular extra-curricular activities in sports and the arts and a wide range of educational trips. These make a significant contribution to pupils' personal development and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The local authority has provided strong support to raise standards in literacy and numeracy and to improve the quality of teaching. It is now easing off the level of support in recognition of the rapid improvement that the school is making.

■ The governance of the school:

- Under the new Chair of the Governing Body, the effectiveness of the governing body has improved in leaps and bounds. New governors have joined the governing body to add a range of skills that were previously lacking. The governing body now holds the school rigorously to account. Governors take part in regular training, especially on data relating to the school's performance. They have established a committee to look specifically at pupils' achievement. As a result, they know how well the school is doing in comparison to similar schools locally and nationally and where it could do better. Governors are regular visitors to classrooms and feedback their findings to other governors. Consequently, they are well versed in the quality of teaching. Governors have supported the headteacher in making performance management more rigorous, including that of the headteacher and other senior leaders. They have strengthened the link between performance and promotion up the salary scale. Governors have a firm grasp on the school's finances and hold the headteacher rigorously to account for the impact that spending has on standards across the school.

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	119297
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	430969

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	78
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joanne Hill
Headteacher	Andrew Proctor
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2012
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