

Aston by Sutton Primary School

Aston Lane, Aston, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 3DB

Inspection dates 22–23 January 2014

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		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Achievement is improving and pupils make good progress. Attainment at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 is above average.
- Pupils enjoy learning because teachers offer a variety of activities including time for discussion and working together.
- Writing has improved because teachers use visits and topical events as a focus for pupils' learning.
- Older pupils produce some sophisticated and high quality work using information and communication technology (ICT).
- Parents have very positive views of the school. Several travel quite a distance to the school because they value the focus on caring as well as the high academic expectations.
- Pupils really enjoy attending this small school because they know everyone and have many friends. Staff know every child, not only those in their class, and this contributes greatly to pupils feeling safe and secure.
- The effective leadership team has implemented more thorough tracking of pupils' progress and checking the quality of teaching. This has extended the successes seen in Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Progress is not always good in lessons especially when pupils lose their natural enthusiasm for learning. Tasks are sometimes too easy, especially for the most able, and occasionally fail to sustain pupils' interest from the start to the finish of the lesson.
- In mathematics, pupils are less secure in using their skills to solve problems and to show how they carry out their calculations.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, staff are not always at hand to extend children's learning with questions and advice.
- Leaders do not always draw up easy-to-follow written documents to move the school forward. The link between actions and their impact on pupils' progress is not always apparent.
- Governors are not fully involved in the initial discussions that set the school's priorities.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching in all classes and visited eight lessons and parts of lessons. She observed pupils as they received additional support.
- Discussions were held with staff, pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Pupils' work was analysed with a focus on writing and mathematics in Years 2 and 6.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's improvement plan, the evaluations of its performance, data on pupils' progress and information about safeguarding.
- The views of 25 parents were analysed through the on-line questionnaire (Parent View). Other parents shared their opinions about the school as they dropped their children off at school and by letter to the inspector.

Inspection team

Jennifer Platt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The vast majority of pupils are White British and no pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is slightly above the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- Several pupils start school at different times of the year and some leave and then return.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, those from service families and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is below average.
- The government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics do not apply in this school because of the small size of the year groups.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and pupils' progress from good to outstanding by:
 - sustaining pupils' interest throughout lessons so that they always give full attention to the teacher and work hard
 - keeping an eye on the work set for pupils to make sure that is not too easy, especially for the most able pupils
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills and checking that they understand their methods of calculation so that errors can be more easily resolved
 - checking that enough staff are available to support the learning of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - improving the way the school records its effectiveness and future plans, and identifying links between actions and their impact on attainment
 - involving governors more effectively when deciding the school's priorities.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Achievement has been steadily rising in the school and the successes seen in Key Stage 1 are now evident in Key Stage 2. Any analysis of the information about pupils' progress is distorted by the small number in each year and one pupil can represent a high percentage of the total data. However, the work in pupils' books indicates pupils make good progress from their starting points and the rising trend is set to continue.
- Children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are in line with what is expected for their age. However, this picture varies and occasionally starting points are lower. Data showed a dip in attainment as children left the Reception class in their basic literacy and numeracy skills. This has improved this year with more time allocated to small group sessions led by the teacher, although this is restricted when there is only one member of staff.
- Children's books show many make good progress from starting with limited knowledge of letters to writing a simple sentence. They know how to take away one number from another and how to set this down as a sum. Social and creative skills are promoted very successfully and children are prepared well for Year 1.
- The school has an effective system to teach pupils about letters and the sounds they make with a focus on activities. As a result, the number reaching above the expected level in the Year 1 reading test was slightly above average in 2013. The school makes sure that any pupil who does not reach the expected level gets the help needed to reach it when re-tested.
- Progress is good from Year 1 to Year 6. Attainment is above average in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Years 2 and 6. Results of national assessments at the end of Year 2 in 2013 were impressive, especially in reading. At the end of Year 6 data show a more fluctuating pattern because of low numbers in year groups (only nine pupils in 2013) and the impact of newcomers starting school during Key Stage 2. In some classes unavoidable absence because of ill health affects the overall attainment data. Nevertheless, attainment has risen and the strengths seen previously in reading and writing are now evident in mathematics.
- Reading is good because it is always seen as a priority. Every chance to practise skills is taken. In Year 2, pupils research information about their forthcoming visit to a pottery museum and read accurately to the inspector. A competitive element with prizes linked to the number of books read is extending the range and quantity of books enjoyed in Key Stage 2.
- Teachers give great consideration to what will interest their pupils, especially the boys, and use this as a focus for writing. For example, in Year 2 pupils' writing includes imaginative description of the characters in the Willow Pattern story. This is possibly an unlikely theme for this age group but when a visit and an opportunity to make your own pots are included then imagination is captured and good effort assured. Books are often a focus in Year 6 and their overview of the autobiography of Nelson Mandela has increased their wider knowledge of life as well as their ability to produce well-structured and thought-provoking work.
- Attainment in mathematics has been harder for the school to tackle. However, once it was decided the scheme that was being followed was not fit for their purpose, changes moved on at a rapid pace. Teachers now have more scope to add interest to lessons and most include a session to extend pupils' mental calculation skills. Attainment has risen though pupils do not always tackle problems confidently and show the methods used to find their answers. This means teachers cannot identify their mistakes and help them to improve.
- Overall, the most able pupils make good progress by the time they leave school. This has improved with more accurate information about their progress but there remain times in lessons when they could do harder work, especially in mathematics, and make more progress.
- Disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and those who are newcomers to the school make good progress. All flourish in the warm welcome they receive. Teachers check that although the level of their work may be different the overall topics are the same. In Year 6, this group also reviewed the life of Nelson Mandela and recognised his achievements through

pictures and discussion with excellent adult support.

- The number of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium in each class is very low. Often there are just one or two pupils and attainment in national tests cannot be reported. However, school data show no significant difference in their progress or attainment in English and mathematics when compared with other pupils in the school. This reflects the school's effective promotion of equality of opportunity.
- Displays of work including high quality art display point to good skills across subjects. Year 6 pupils use ICT extremely well to produce animated films, advertisements for the school's website and book reviews including video clips and sound.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Many pupils told the inspector that the best thing about the school was the teachers. This is clear in lessons where pupils try hard and many produce neat and well-presented work.
- Pupils are clear about what is expected of them and appreciate what new skills they are to learn. They set to work promptly and success is checked at the end of the lesson when teachers revisit aspects that were not fully understood. This was clear in a mathematics lesson with a reminder that when linking decimals to money it can be helpful to see 1.06 as one pound and six pence. There was no doubt pupils understood the story of the Willow Pattern as one pupil explained, 'This is a traditional Chinese tale and it has no words.'
- In most lessons misconceptions are promptly sorted out by teachers who move briskly between groups checking all are busy and understand. This is not always the case, however, and so sometimes pupils become confused and their interest is not sustained throughout the lesson. For example, when presenting their information on a bar graph, pupils grasped the initial concept, then some lost their way as the lesson progressed. As a result, their enthusiasm for the topic waned and their attention declined.
- The depth of teachers' knowledge is clear in the sharpness of their questions that make pupils think. A focus on pupils' skills intermingles well with facts about a topic. In Year 6, pupils' skills accelerated as they identified adverbial clauses and explained how they add interest to their writing.
- The more rigorous system to track pupils' progress is providing teachers with an accurate picture of pupils' ability. This is being used wisely in most lessons but at times the most able are ready to move on and have to wait for others to complete a task or the work they complete is not fully deepening their skills and knowledge.
- Reading is taught well. During their daily reading sessions pupils have time to read with a group and the teacher, to do research or just enjoy a quiet time with a book.
- Teachers use the interactive white board well to explain new learning in mathematics. The new approach to teaching mathematics is adding interest to lessons, although there are not always enough opportunities to use real-life situations to make learning purposeful.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage benefit from activities that capture their enthusiasm. They loved the idea of organising a celebration and promptly started to make imaginary cakes and lay the table. Outdoors is used creatively to extend learning but when only one member of staff is available nobody is at hand to ask questions and check children's learning. For example, effective questions about the size and shape of the cakes being made were missing so children did not make as much progress as possible.
- An atmosphere conducive to learning is established in lessons because resources are at hand, support staff understand their roles and behaviour is managed successfully.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs benefit from effective help from support staff. Success is reached through prompt identification of their needs, actions that address these and, most importantly, a determination that as far as possible their work will link to that of their class mates.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. At play pupils are boisterous and energetic as they play games and use the equipment provided. This is all done with an understanding of fair play and taking turns so that pupils enjoy their time out of class. In lessons, most behave well and try hard even if, as in Year 6 at the end of a topic, they show signs of being ready for a new challenge. On the odd occasion when pupils become confused or they have to wait for others before moving on, signs of restlessness emerge.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Procedures are secure with good levels of supervision at play and thorough security on visitors entering and leaving school. Risk assessments are carried out before pupils go on visits and observations from staff and governors identify how pupils take care and show respect for others when out and about.
- Pupils recognise the value of attending a small school and it is a privilege to observe the genuine concern they have for each other. On a cold day one young child asked an older one to take her inside for her gloves and this was done most willingly. Pupils rise to the expectation that this is a school where they respect each other. The focus in one assembly was on trust and the importance of this in daily life. Pupils welcome newcomers to the school. As a result, these pupils settle happily and flourish, both academically and socially.
- In discussions pupils explain how visitors and teachers pass on essential messages about how to keep themselves safe. They understand the dangers of bullying on the internet because the police have talked very strongly to them about this and their parents also attended a workshop. Pupils know about other types of bullying and say that they have never seen any in their school. They do recall the odd name calling which they understand can be upsetting and know to discuss this with staff if it arises.
- Data on attendance show it is in line with the national average. Most pupils attend regularly and the small number who need time off for health reasons are provided with help so that they do not fall behind with their work.
- Pupils who met with the inspector worked together to write their overall opinion of the school. They agreed on the following, 'This is a happy and friendly school. It is good attending a small school because everyone welcomes newcomers.' They recall the support they received from their older buddy when they started school because the pupil was friendly and kind.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and assistant headteacher make an effective team. They go that extra mile to bring about change in a school that has a tight budget and few staff to carry out management roles. As well as their senior leadership role both set an example to others by leading successfully the provision for special educational needs and mathematics. Staff and governors respect their example and reflect it in their own practice. As a result, the school is in a good position to move forward.
- Discussions with senior leaders, middle leaders and governors show an accurate recognition of what the school does well and how it can improve. This is not as evident in the school's documents about its effectiveness and future development plans. They leave the reader unsure of the overall judgments being made. These documents identify priorities but do not spell out clearly how actions are going to raise attainment. This weakness to some extent is overcome by detailed evaluations from external consultants and the more precise action plans drawn up by middle leaders. For example, the weaker aspect in mathematics has been identified, actions taken and attainment is rising.
- Checking on pupils' progress has improved with a more thorough system in place to enable the school to extract information about the progress of different groups of pupils. This information is used well to target support where it is most needed. Teaching is checked closely and training and help provided where it is needed. A few weaker aspects remain to ensure teaching always leads to effective learning. Training is linked well to teachers' and the school's needs. For example, staff have improved their understanding of the levels pupils are expected to reach in

writing so that assessments are now more secure.

- Teachers have targets linked to pupils' progress and regular meetings with the headteacher check closely on how well pupils are doing. Explanations of any lack of progress are sought and action taken to avoid pupils falling behind.
- The curriculum meets the needs of pupils and the adjustment to topics and new resources are engaging boys more in their learning. Many visits and visitors widen pupils' experiences as well as promoting their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Links with a school with a wider mix of cultures and traditions have fallen by the wayside a little, although learning about other faiths and cultures is part of lessons and assembly themes.
- Sports funding is being used effectively to increase pupils' skills. Professional coaches enhance skills in rugby and gymnastics and provide additional clubs which increase pupils' awareness of keeping fit. Staff observe these sessions, picking up tips for the future. This funding has come at a good time for the school with a new hall which has made an amazing difference to daily life in school. Pupils no longer have to vacate their classroom to provide a room for dinner. Assemblies and school productions now have an excellent venue.
- Child protection and safeguarding procedures meet requirements. Parents can rest assured that their children are happy and flourish in the school.
- Links with the local authority are effective and the evaluation reports effectively fill a gap in the school's own written documentation.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has incorporated new governors to increase their bank of skills. This is helping especially with financial management to check that with a tight budget any spending provides value for money. Governors check the spending of pupil-premium funds and check to see this is beneficial for these pupils. They value extending a range of experiences including tuition in playing a brass instrument and support for visits. Governors' knowledge of teaching is secure but is based more on information received than first-hand knowledge. Although governors are informed of the school's priorities they are unsure of how these appear in the school documents and are not fully involved in discussions when priorities are discussed. They keep an eye on arrangements to check teachers' performance and the impact on spending. Recent training about data and how information is presented to the school has been beneficial. Governors now compare the school's results with national data. Governors who met the inspector were knowledgeable about how the previous scheme for mathematics was too prescriptive and the new approach is allowing teachers to be more imaginative in their teaching. It is clear from minutes of meetings that governors ask searching questions especially in relation to pupils' progress and spending.

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	110993
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	430955

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	92
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Debbie Coker
Headteacher	Christopher Abbott
Date of previous school inspection	30 May 2012
Telephone number	01928 711 953
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Email address	admin@aston.cheshire.sch.uk

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