

Derwent Lower School

Hitchin Road, Henlow, SG16 6BA

Inspection dates 23–24 January 2014

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.

- The headteacher has improved the school rapidly. She has built a strong sense of purpose among the staff and given them clear direction on how to improve their teaching.
- Teachers are keen to improve their teaching and work closely together to ensure that the school's systems for improving learning are implemented in every classroom.
- The pupils currently in the school are making good progress because teaching is good and much is outstanding.
- The good care and support given to all pupils mean that they behave well, feel safe and are keen to learn.
- The school's openness to new ideas and willingness to take on good advice have led to the growing effectiveness of subject leaders.
- The governing body provides a good and increasing level of support. Governors work successfully with the headteacher to improve teaching and pupils' achievement and help staff in developing their practice.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In some lessons, where pupils are all given similar work, more-able pupils are not challenged sufficiently.
- Pupils do not always challenge themselves to achieve as much as they could.
- Marking and guidance to pupils are exceptionally strong in English, but are not as helpful in improving pupils' work in other subjects.
- The partnership with parents is not as well developed as it could be because they are not given enough information about their children's progress.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited nine lessons or part-lessons. All of the teachers were observed teaching.
- Some of the lesson observations were made together with the headteacher. Short visits were made to observe the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make).
- Pupils' work from each key stage was looked at with the headteacher and assistant headteacher in order to check pupils' progress and how well the books were marked.
- The inspector observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, the school's records of monitoring, minutes of meetings of the governing body, and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- The inspector listened to pupils read, attended parts of two assemblies, and observed pupils eating their lunch and playing on the playground during a breaktime.
- The inspector met with a group of pupils and spoke to pupils around the school. He interviewed members of staff and parents, and spoke to members of the governing body and representatives from the local authority.
- The views of parents were obtained through a survey carried out by the school, by speaking to parents on the playground and through the 49 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection team

St John Burkett, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a much smaller school than average. Pupils are organised into five classes, one for each year group.
- The vast majority of pupils are White British.
- A very low proportion of the pupils are eligible for pupil premium because they are in the care of the local authority or known to be eligible for free school meals. However, a high proportion (around 60%) have a parent serving in the Armed Forces, mostly on the base next to the school. At any one time, a significant number of these children's parents are on extended service abroad. These pupils are also eligible for pupil premium.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- More than one third of the pupils join or leave the school at other than the usual times, mainly due to postings of Armed Forces personnel.
- The school has at its own request been supported in its work by a national leader of education who is the headteacher at Fairfield Park Lower School in Stotfold, and also by the local authority.
- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed, who took up post in April 2013. A new chair of governors was elected in September 2013 and the school's first assistant headteacher also took up post from September 2013. Half of the teaching staff have been appointed in the last two years.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide effective challenge for all pupils, especially the most able, by:
 - ensuring that teachers make effective use of their knowledge about what pupils know and understand when planning and providing work in lessons
 - extending the high quality marking observed in English work to other subjects.
- Develop the partnership with parents by giving them more detailed information about their children's progress, so they are able to support their children's learning more effectively.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- All groups of pupils currently in the school are making good progress. Pupils typically begin school with skills that are below the levels expected, and leave Year 4 with attainment that is usually above the level expected for their age group in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Good teaching in the Reception class enables children to make good progress. By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, their attainment is closer to the national average.
- Results in the phonics screening check in Year 1 rose in 2013, though they were still below average, and are predicted to rise again in 2014.
- Results in teachers' assessments at the end of Year 2 in 2013 appear to suggest a marked drop in pupils' attainment over previous years. This is not the case. First, this was a much lower-attaining year group than is usual in this school on entry to Year 1. Second, assessments in previous years were not securely based on evidence of progress in pupils' work; as such, they were not an accurate reflection of pupils' attainment, which was actually lower.
- The new headteacher has worked successfully with staff to improve the accuracy with which they judge the National Curriculum levels achieved by pupils. There is now considerable rigour in the process, and teachers have to demonstrate that pupils have a secure grasp of a level before they are awarded it. Overall, standards by the end of Year 2 are generally broadly average or slightly above average and pupils make good progress. Attainment is on track to be higher in 2014.
- In Key Stage 2 pupils continue to make good progress, with boys and girls achieving as well as each other. Their literacy skills are particularly well developed and writing seen during the inspection was imaginative and of high quality. In one class they listened to and discussed the Fleetwood Mac song *Albatross* before writing Haiku (a Japanese form of poetry) poems about the sea using inventive language. Current pupils in Year 4 are on track to leave school at the end of the year with attainment that exceeds national expectations.
- The school has systematically introduced improvements to enable pupils to make faster progress. Teachers plan carefully for all groups and ensure that pupils are challenged to achieve their best work. They talk to pupils during lessons about how they can do even better. However, the more-able pupils are not always challenged to develop their thinking as well as they could, particularly in lessons where the same work is set for all pupils in a class when it is not appropriate to do so.
- In the past, the school did not track pupils' individual progress with sufficient rigour, and as a result some fell behind. The school has successfully tackled weaknesses in teaching and now carefully monitors how each child is doing. This ensures that all groups of pupils are now making good progress.
- Pupils known to be eligible for funding through the pupil premium make progress that is close to or above that of their peers. In 2012 these pupils were a term behind their classmates on average in reading, writing and mathematics. This gap has now closed so that they achieve equally well in all year groups. This is due to the good use the school is making of the funding to match pupils' work closely to their individual needs and to ensure additional support helps them to achieve well, such as through the 'Comfy and Cosy' Club which helps to boost pupils'

confidence and teaches them to communicate well.

- Pupils who have special educational needs make good progress. Their needs are closely assessed, and good help and guidance ensures that they are able to work alongside their peers in the classroom.
- Pupils' attitudes to staying fit and healthy are positive because they enjoy a wide variety of sporting activities which the school organises through the use of the primary school sport funding. For example, the Redbourne Partnership ensures the provision of competitive sport through festivals where different schools meet together.

The quality of teaching is good

- There has been a rapid improvement in the quality of teaching since the new headteacher's appointment. The school's own data indicate that increasing numbers of pupils are reaching higher standards because of improved teaching. All teaching seen during the inspection was at least good, and half was outstanding. Teaching assistants are used well and make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and present topics to pupils in an engaging way. Both parents and pupils highlighted this when commenting about the school. A number of pupils said their teachers and the work which they gave them was 'the best thing about the school'.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have been trained recently in how they use questions. This is working well, with the result that teachers rarely accept simple answers without probing pupils' understanding in order to deepen their thinking.
- Another successful initiative introduced by the headteacher has improved the accuracy with which teachers assess the levels pupils have reached in their work. This means that the work they set generally challenges pupils in line with their ability, though it does not always stretch the most-able pupils enough.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is planned and organised well. This enables children to make good progress because activities are matched very closely to their individual needs. Skills in literacy, communication and mathematics are developed strongly through well-thought-out strategies and because the teacher and other adults work very closely together.
- Pupils who have special educational needs are well supported in class because teachers and other adults plan carefully to meet their diverse learning needs, and because the school takes parents' views into account through regular meetings when organising the pupils' work.
- Teachers have focused recently on improving the teaching of writing. They have changed their practice and now include 'Big Write' sessions weekly, enabling pupils to write at length on various topics. In one class, for example, pupils were enthusiastically engaged in writing about the Tudors, imagining themselves in a street in the time of Henry VIII. Together with the very high quality of marking, this has led to pupils making rapid progress across the school in this subject. There has also been an improvement in the teaching of the sounds which letters make, ensuring a growing number of pupils meet the expected standard in the Year 1 and Year 2 phonics checks.
- Teachers are conscientious in their marking, and the quality of advice given to pupils is good. Marking in English, and particularly in writing, is outstanding, but that in other subjects is not as

thorough. Growing use is made of targets, which are stuck in books and the home/school links book. Consequently, pupils talk with growing confidence about the next steps they are taking in their learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good around the school because pupils are clear about the school's expectations. The headteacher introduced clear sets of 'golden rules' for behaviour, which pupils know and respond to well. Pupils' behaviour in classrooms is good because they are keen to learn and try their best to improve their knowledge and skills. Very occasionally, a tiny number of pupils need reminding not to waste time.
- Pupils work well on their own, together and with adults, and value the rewards for good behaviour which the school offers. They are always polite. Staff model good behaviour – for example, not a single raised adult voice was heard during the inspection.
- Pupils' attitudes to writing and to other subjects have improved because of the interesting activities all teachers now plan for them. Pupils are proud of their work and expect to enjoy their lessons. They work hard and try their best during them. All of the pupils questioned during the inspection said their favourite aspect of going to school was their lessons in their classrooms and the way their teachers taught them.
- Pupils enjoy writing at length. For example, pupils in one class were writing about *The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch* and had rewritten their own versions of the story. In another class, pupils were planning to write a story based on *Cinderella*, having been taken to see the pantomime. They discussed their highly imaginative ideas with enthusiasm, and were clearly strongly engaged by the task.
- Pupils are proud to be at the school. They look smart in their uniforms and take care to keep the school neat and tidy.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say that there is always an adult available to sort out any situation that may arise. They are familiar with the different types of bullying, such as cyber-bullying, and say there have not been any such issues they can remember. No incidents have been logged by the headteacher since she arrived at the school.
- Attendance has risen and is in line with the national average. The rates are affected by the persistent absence of a small number of pupils. The school is working closely with their families and other organisations to ensure these pupils attend school more regularly. Because of the success of this work, attendance is set to rise.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has over the past nine months systematically tackled the key areas needed for the school to make rapid improvement, particularly in teaching. As a result, achievement has improved and standards are rising.
- The new strong and supportive leadership team, aided by the governing body, is having a positive impact on pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. Subject leaders are developing their skills through well-selected training and are working closely with the headteacher, successfully raising the rate of pupils' progress.

- Robust systems have been implemented for managing the performance of staff. As a consequence, the quality of teaching has improved rapidly. All staff now take responsibility for the results of the pupils they work with and are committed to ensuring good progress by improving how well they teach. The headteacher closely checks the progress of pupils who are in danger of falling behind, and works with teachers to ensure those pupils continue to make good progress.
- The school shares and develops teachers' best teaching skills through visits to other classrooms and schools and through systems of mentoring. This has improved the quality of teaching, and the proportion that is good or better has improved markedly since the last inspection.
- The school requested and received exceptional support from the local authority, including visits from a school improvement consultant and a national leader of education. The support included teachers and new leaders attending highly effective training courses, and a review of governance was carried out. Due to the school's openness to seek and act upon good advice, it has ensured teaching and learning have improved rapidly.
- The curriculum has developed in line with pupils' changing learning needs, and is now more active and practical in approach, particularly in the way reading and writing are taught. The wide range of subjects taught are supplemented by other activities beyond the normal timetable, such as trips to the theatre. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well.
- The school is providing growing amounts of useful information to parents about their child's progress, for example through the new website and the home/school link book. It is also developing additional opportunities for parents to visit the school. Even so, some parents who spoke to the inspector or responded to the online survey did not feel they received good information about their child's progress. The school and governors acknowledge this.
- Safeguarding procedures are strong and meet current national requirements, and a thorough audit has kept standards high.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The new interim chair of governors has developed the practice of the governing body so that it now provides a high level of challenge to the school and the headteacher. Governors have an accurate view of the school due to the very high quality of information provided by the headteacher. Governors focus on how well pupils are learning.
 - Governors understand data on pupils' progress and attainment and are determined that the school will improve further. They are ambitious and strongly supportive of the headteacher and the improvements she is making to the school.
 - They make sure teachers' pay and promotion are linked to the contribution made to raising achievement and standards. They have also taken action to address underperformance, based on this information, which has ensured the quality of teaching in the school has risen.
 - Governors scrutinise in detail the provision made for the pupil premium and the primary school sports funding, asking key questions about the impact of money spent, and ensure that eligible pupils benefit from the funding.
 - A review of governance was recently carried out at the request of the governing body. It confirms the growing strength of governance at 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	109457
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	440446

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	First
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	5–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	121
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jacqueline Marshall
Headteacher	Kirstie Yuen
Date of previous school inspection	8 February 2011
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