

Ad Astra Infant School

Sherborn Crescent, Canford Heath, Poole, BH17 8AP

Inspection dates 29–30 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Ad Astra continues to improve and develop, managing well the required transition last year from being a first school to an infant school, which was achieved very smoothly.
- Pupils' progress is good. In the 2013 end of Key Stage 1 national assessments, many pupils reached average standards in reading, writing and mathematics from their below average starting points.
- Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved markedly in the last two years. Children are now taught consistently well and make good progress.
- All groups of pupils, including those eligible for pupil premium funding, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, share in the good achievement.
- Teaching is rarely less than good and is sometimes outstanding. Teachers typically plan effectively, manage classes well and use a range of resources and strategies to ensure good learning.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well, feel safe in school and are confident that adults will deal quickly with any incidents that may arise.
- The good curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well by offering a range of well-planned experiences.
- The experienced headteacher gives a strong direction to the work of the school. Together with the two assistant headteachers, she is working to lift the quality of teaching to outstanding.
- Governors are very knowledgeable about the school's work. They monitor all aspects of its work closely, provide effective support and hold leaders to account robustly for pupils' achievements.
- Parents and carers are very proud of the school. They are happy that their children are safe and well cared for. They find teachers and school leaders very approachable.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The plans to modify the curriculum and be more flexible in the organisation of groups, have yet to ensure that all opportunities are taken for pupils to use their developing skills, especially in writing.
- Although a start has been made, plans for staff to share their skills and expertise to enable further improvements are not fully implemented.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 21 lessons. In addition, the inspectors made a number of other shorter visits to lessons and attended an assembly. They heard some pupils in Years 1 and 2 read.
- Discussions were held with members of the governing body, staff, groups of pupils and a local authority representative.
- The inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including the data the school has collected on pupils’ attainment and progress, procedures for keeping pupils safe and the school development plan.
- Inspectors met with a number of parents, took account of the 42 responses to the on-line parent questionnaire (Parent View) in making their judgements and the 40 questionnaires returned by members of staff.

Inspection team

David Marshall, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sue Hunnings

Additional Inspector

Fiona Robinson

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized infant school.
- The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is increasing, but is still well below average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional funding provided by the government for children in local authority care, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those from service families, is average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported by school action is broadly average. The proportion supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- At the beginning of this school year the school completed its transition from being a first school to the current infant school. There are now three classes in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and three classes in each of Years 1 and 2.
- Ad Astra is part of a cooperative trust of four schools called the TEACH Trust (The Educational Alliance of Canford Heath).

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching to make sure that more pupils reach the highest levels of attainment by the time they leave the school by:
 - furthering the plans to modify the curriculum, and by having greater flexibility in the organisation of groups, to ensure that all pupils are given maximum opportunities to use their developing skills, especially in writing.
 - developing further methods for staff to share the best practice throughout the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children join the school with skills and abilities which vary considerably, but are generally below those expected for their age. Children in the Reception classes develop good social skills. They settle in quickly, and work and play happily and confidently together. They gain a good grasp of early reading skills because of the highly effective teaching they receive. As a result, they quickly develop a love of books and reading.
- Results in national tests in reading, writing and mathematics in 2013 showed broadly average attainment. The school's own rigorous and soundly-based assessments show that current Year 2 pupils are doing better than Year 2 at a similar time last year.
- Standards in reading throughout the school are often above average, and pupils talk enthusiastically about the books they have read. Results were average in the recent phonics screening check for Year 1 pupils. The school has reorganised the teaching of letters and sounds and pupils are now making good progress.
- In mathematics, pupils gain a good understanding of early skills in using numbers, and apply them well to solving problems. The good curriculum gives pupils many opportunities to practise and extend their mathematics skills in real-life tasks.
- Pupils' workbooks and the detailed records of progress in school show that pupils in each age group have achieved well in writing over time. Progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 dipped this year, but pupils are making faster progress since the introduction of different ways of organising the ability groups.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good, and sometimes excellent, progress. Carefully organised smaller groups mean that teachers, ably supported by well-trained teaching assistants, can work individually with pupils, and quickly adapt tasks to meet individual needs.
- The school spends the pupil premium money to very good effect on additional teaching support for the pupils who qualify for it. The attainment of this group compares very favourably with others in the school and pupils nationally. School records and pupils' books show that progress for this group, and in particular those eligible for free school meals, is at least good, and that these pupils catch up with others well. They work together well in group and individual tasks, confirming their good social development.
- Almost all the parents who responded to Parent View and to the school's own surveys strongly agreed that their children make good progress.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers and pupils enjoy being in school. All staff are good at making sure work is interesting. For example, some pupils in Year 1 practised doubling numbers by using simple apparatus well and chanting the numbers out loud. They used their dominoes increasingly quickly with excitement.
- Teachers use made-up words well to teach phonics, but they are careful not to confuse the pupils. In a lesson in Year 2, pupils grouped words into different spellings of the same sound, but then the teacher modified her lesson to enable the pupils to act out a scene with the words in them. This meant that they had to think hard, not only about the sounds but also what the words meant.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good overall, and sometimes outstanding. In a particularly good language session the teacher played a game with pupils which related to the Chinese New Year. She skilfully used the video clip and harder or easier questions to challenge children of all abilities. The children were delighted with the game and learnt very rapidly.
- In the same session, children chose from different activities. These covered a good range of things, some suggested by the children themselves and some put out by the teacher to prompt

discussions about numbers. Teaching assistants worked well with small groups and individuals, prompting and questioning, and making sure the children were learning well. This was typical of the good help they provide in lessons for all age groups.

- When teachers introduce each lesson, they tell pupils what they are trying to learn and what they themselves will be looking for. This helps the pupils to try hard. In Year 1, pupils did word jigsaws and played a dice game with teaching assistants. They all learned quickly because the words were changed to be exactly at the right level of difficulty for each group.
- Teachers mark pupils' work thoroughly. Teachers' comments in books, the use of highlighters, and the very good discussions they have, show pupils clearly where and how to improve their work. Pupils are given time to respond to the comments, especially in their literacy work.
- Although teachers plan their lessons thoroughly, very occasionally the quality of teaching is reduced and progress slackens when teachers do not always adapt planned work quickly enough when the need arises. This can be when pupils are already good at something and need to move on to something new or when they need a little more time to master a new idea before going off to work on their own.
- Parents and carers are very appreciative of both the quality of teaching and the resulting good progress made by their children.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is consistently outstanding. Procedures for the management of behaviour are well known throughout the school. An emphasis on rewarding and celebrating good behaviour encourages all pupils to maintain very high standards of behaviour.
- Over time, the school's records show very few incidents requiring intervention. Pupils, parents and the great majority of staff are confident that behaviour is excellent. School records, parents' and pupils' views all indicate that bullying is very rare. Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent in all lessons. Pupils look forward to lessons, they are punctual and they try their best at all times. This is reflected in their above average attendance. They listen attentively and work happily in pairs and small groups where they relate very well to adults and to their classmates.
- There is a harmonious and supportive atmosphere throughout the school. Pupils go out of their way to help others, they have a very clear understanding of acceptable behaviour and, because they are relaxed and happy, they socialise very successfully. This has a very positive impact on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils and their parents report that they feel safe at all times. As one parent wrote, 'It feels like a family, a very safe place for our children to be.' Specific lessons and assemblies teach the pupils effectively about dangers and how to keep themselves free from harm. As they progress through the school, the pupils develop an excellent understanding of how to avoid unsafe situations.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides strong leadership and is passionate about driving the school forward. She, together with the assistant headteachers, inspires pupils and staff, and has ensured the drive to improve has been maintained throughout the recent changes and they have created a warm supportive learning environment for all pupils. The school is well focused on achieving their aim for every pupil to 'enjoy and celebrate their achievements and uniqueness'.
- The leadership, including middle leaders, has successfully focused on bringing about improvements in learning and subsequent improvements to pupils' progress, through addressing weaker teaching. As one staff member wrote, 'I feel supported within the school to be the best teacher I can be.' As the senior leaders acknowledge, there is the opportunity to improve teaching further by sharing best practice in the school and across the schools in the cooperative trust.
- Teamwork is excellent and everyone, including the administrative team and caretaking staff, are

considerable assets to the school and are very much appreciated by all concerned.

- The management of teachers' performance is good. One recently appointed teacher commented the system she had experienced had helped her to settle and to improve her teaching. There is a strong link between the quality of teaching and the pay staff receive.
- The curriculum is very well planned and adapted to meet the needs and interests of pupils of different ages and abilities, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Pupils' interest is sparked by a range of topics, including the one based on the Chinese New Year, in which pupils develop their reading and writing skills by examining the difference between their culture and others. The Year 2 focus on giving pupils more responsibility to research aspects of their topic work for themselves is proving to be successful. The school is looking to extend this and modify the curriculum to provide more opportunities of this kind.
- The curriculum also promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very effectively, for example by enabling pupils to learn about different faiths and ways of life. The school provides a good range of visits, special events and after-school clubs, which parents greatly appreciate.
- Leaders use pupil premium money well to ensure that no pupil is prevented by financial reasons from taking part in after-school or enrichment activities. This, together with the good achievement of all groups within the school, demonstrates its success in promoting equality of opportunity and tackling any form of discrimination. The new funding to enhance physical education is being put to good use through the sharing of resources with other schools to provide specialist teaching and to share best practice.
- The local authority has supported the school well in their change from first to infant school. It rightly recognises that the amount of support it gives is that of a light touch. The school also offers a great deal of much appreciated support and help to other local schools, particularly through the work of the headteacher.
- Ad Astra school is the lead school in Poole for a primary school SCITT (School Centred Initial Teacher Training). This brings many benefits to the school and to other local schools through enabling it to reflect on its own practice and keep up-to-date with new developments to help new entrants to the profession.
- Arrangements for safeguarding children, including vetting new staff appointments, are rigorous and meet all requirements.
- Parents and carers, including practically all of those who responded to the Parent View and the school's own surveys, express high levels of satisfaction with the school's performance.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is fully involved in all school processes, checking decisions and requesting explanations where necessary. It holds the school to account in a challenging, but supportive, manner by asking probing questions when presented with documents and reports, including those related to the quality of teaching. Governors ensure that pupil premium funding is spent appropriately on additional one-to-one support or additional resources. The governing body also has a firm grasp of the school's finances. Its involvement in, and understanding of, the requirements for improvement for each member of staff through their performance management targets underpin the school's strong capacity for further improvement.
 - Governors undertake regular professional training through the local authority. The governing body ensures that the school's safeguarding policies are very thorough, reviewed regularly, and that all procedures are robust and secure and staff are fully trained.

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	113742
Local authority	Poole
Inspection number	441002

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	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	266
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chas Rowling
Headteacher	Val Arbon
Date of previous school inspection	23 June 2009
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