

Featherstone Wood Primary School

Featherston Road, Stevenage, SG2 9PP

Inspection dates 30–31 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Pupils' progress in mathematics is too slow because they are not taught clear methods of calculation which they can apply when solving problems.
- Too few pupils make better than expected progress in writing because they are not challenged to improve their skills when writing at length in a range of subjects.
- Leaders are not able to show how the pupil premium is helping to improve the achievement of eligible pupils.
- Leaders are not checking regularly to see if all planned actions are helping to raise achievement.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work, although improving, is not yet showing pupils how to improve their work in all classes and subjects.
- In lessons, pupils do not always listen carefully to the teacher or work as hard as they can to complete their work.
- Pupils are not encouraged to move quickly to the next stage of their learning as soon as they are ready.
- Teachers in charge of subjects do not use school performance information to check if teaching is leading to good progress in their subjects across the school.
- Although leaders check the quality of teaching, they do not yet follow up areas for improvement after a short period to see if the teaching is getting better.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils make good progress in the nursery and reception classes and are prepared well for the next stage in their education.
- The progress pupils made in reading in Key Stage 2 improved significantly in 2013.
- Governors, although quite new to the school, are very knowledgeable and show great determination that the school will continue to improve rapidly.
- The newly appointed headteacher has introduced good systems for keeping a close eye on how well pupils are doing and is taking effective action to improve the quality of teaching.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and, as a result, their attendance is improving.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 18 lessons during the course of the inspection. Two of these lesson observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, six school governors, the mathematics and English subject leaders, the Special Educational Needs Leader, the Early Years Foundation Stage Leader and two representatives from the local authority.
- Discussions were held with groups of pupils and the behaviour of pupils was observed around the school and on the playground at lunch time. Inspectors also listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors scrutinised the behaviour and incident logs, the governing body minutes, action plans, performance management documents and school performance information.
- A selection of pupils' exercise books from across the school was looked at.
- Inspectors talked to parents who were dropping their children off before school, and also took into account the views of the 12 parents who completed the on-line questionnaire, Parent View.
- Staff completed a questionnaire about their views of the school.

Inspection team

Robin Taverner, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Janet Watson

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Information about this school

- Featherstone Wood Primary School is a smaller than average primary school.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium, which is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, for pupils who are looked after by the local authority or those from service families, is above average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs and who are supported at school action, is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement is also above average.
- The school does not meet the government floor standards which set out the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- A new headteacher took up her post at the beginning of January 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that all lessons are good or better by:
 - ensuring pupils, particularly those of high ability, move rapidly to the next challenge in their learning as soon as they are ready
 - insisting that pupils listen carefully to the teacher and remain on task throughout all lessons
 - building on improvements in marking so that pupils know how to improve their work in all subjects.
- Improve achievement, particularly in mathematics and writing, by:
 - teaching pupils clear strategies for calculation, so that they know exactly how to solve problems in mathematics
 - giving pupils opportunities to write at length in a range of subjects so that they can practise and improve their skills
 - encouraging pupils to write quickly and legibly using clear joined script
 - checking that pupil premium funds are helping to raise achievement for eligible pupils.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - training middle leaders to understand performance information so that they can identify where achievement needs to improve and take swift action to raise achievement where necessary
 - using plans to insist that improvements happen within short time scales and all actions are checked regularly for their impact on raising achievement
 - making sure that, where teaching needs to improve, development points are followed up after a short time.
- An external review of the school's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- In Years 3 to 6, too few pupils made expected or better than expected progress in mathematics which is why, in the 2013 end of Key Stage 2 tests, standards were well below the national average.
- Standards in writing in 2013 were also well below the national average and this was because too few pupils made better than expected progress. However, the proportion making expected progress in writing improved and was in line with the national average. Teachers do not expect pupils to write in well-presented, joined script and pupils have too few opportunities to practise writing at length in a variety of lessons and subjects. In particular, expectations of pupils' writing in topic and science books are low.
- Pupils begin Year 1 with standards that are average. By the end of Year 2 in recent years, standards in reading, writing and mathematics have been below average because teaching has not been good enough to ensure that pupils make good progress in all lessons. Pupils currently in Year 2, however, are making much better progress due to the good and outstanding teaching they are receiving. Consequently, they are on track to achieve higher standards in the end of Year 2 assessments.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the required standard in the phonics (linking letters and sounds) screening check was below the national average in 2013. Staff have received training in the teaching of phonics and now more pupils are on track to achieve the end of Year 1 standard. In one outstanding phonics lesson a group of high ability pupils made excellent progress with their spelling and phonic skills when converting verbs in the present tense to verbs in the past tense by adding 'ed'.
- In 2013, pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium were five terms behind their classmates in reading and two terms behind in English grammar, spelling and punctuation. Up until recently, the pupil premium has paid for the running of an after-school club and therefore has not been used well to raise the achievement of these pupils. However, inspectors found that, in most lessons, pupils in danger of falling behind with their learning are given good support. School performance information for pupils in the school currently is showing that many of these pupils are making good progress and catching up with their classmates. The use of the pupil premium is being reviewed currently to make sure it is spent more appropriately in the future.
- Pupils join the school nursery with skills below those expected for their age. They make good progress during their time in the nursery and reception classes and are well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- Since September 2013, school leaders, including the special educational needs leader, have improved the quality of support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Extra lessons have been put in place and teachers are giving suitable work for the pupils with low ability. As a result, these pupils are now making expected progress and some are making better than expected progress.
- The school took effective action in 2013 to improve the teaching of reading. This led to much better rates of progress which were in line with national averages for expected and better than expected progress.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- School leaders have taken effective action recently to eradicate inadequate teaching. Lessons seen during the inspection were mostly good. However, there are still too many lessons which require improvement.
- Sometimes lessons are very well planned and pupils are provided with high-quality resources to help them to learn. However, progress for a minority of pupils is limited because the teacher does not insist that they work hard and stay on task. For example, in one lesson observed, pupils were choosing a conjunction to join sentences together. Several pupils lost concentration and stopped working but the teacher was not quick enough to pick this up and insist that they worked hard throughout the lesson.
- Pupils are not always given good and clear methods to solve problems. In a mathematics lesson, for example, pupils were taught how to use train timetables but were not given a straightforward method to calculate the amount of time a train would take between stations. This prevented some pupils from succeeding in their task which meant that they did not make enough progress in the lesson.
- In some lessons, pupils are spending too much time practising skills they have already learnt, rather than being moved quickly on to the next challenge. In one lesson, for example, some high ability pupils understood perfectly how to find percentages of numbers and could explain the process clearly because they had covered this in a previous lesson. Instead of providing more challenge, the teacher asked the pupils to practise these skills further which did not help them to move onto the next steps.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work is improving in English and mathematics but is not consistent across the school. In the best examples, pupils are shown what they do well and what they need to improve. Pupils are then given the opportunity to improve their work using the advice given. This good practice is not seen in all year groups and in all subjects. Sometimes the marking is of high quality but the pupils have not been given time to read the comments and then edit or improve their work.
- The abilities of teaching assistants to support pupils with their learning are variable. Some are very skilled at asking the right questions and encouraging pupils to think for themselves. Others, however, give too much support which prevents pupils from trying to master new skills for themselves.
- Where teaching is best, teachers build on the knowledge and skills pupils have been taught in previous lessons and, by giving clear explanations and demonstrations, ensure that new skills and knowledge are introduced and fully understood. Pupils are also made clear about the reasons why they are learning particular skills. Pupils then complete tasks successfully, showing that they have met the high expectations of the teachers. For example, in a handwriting lesson, Key Stage 1 pupils were taught how to join their letters and the teacher was very clear as to why it was so important for pupils to master this skill. They worked hard and improved their handwriting skills significantly during the lesson.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- The school's work to keep pupils safe is good. Pupils have a very good knowledge about how to stay safe including how to avoid the dangers of the internet. Pupils are not worried about being bullied and are confident that, should they have any worries, these will be dealt with effectively

by school staff. The school provides a safe and secure environment for the pupils. They play sensibly on the playground at lunch times, are cheerful and get along with each other very well.

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because some pupils do not listen to the teacher very well in lessons and, on occasions, even talk at the same time as the teacher. Pupils do not always try to do their best work and sometimes spend periods of time off task, playing with or annoying the pupils near to them. The school is working hard to improve attitudes to learning, including talking to pupils about their views of how the school might be improved. The majority of pupils do work hard and, as a result, make good progress in lessons.
- Pupils are polite and courteous to visitors to the school. Pupils are well mannered, including when eating their lunch.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the new behaviour management systems the school leaders have recently put in place and are clear about what happens if they behave badly.
- Due to the good impact of the new behaviour management policy, exclusions (periods of time when pupils are not allowed in school due to poor behaviour) have reduced and no pupils have been excluded since September 2013.
- Attendance in 2013 was better than 2012 and is now average. The school has effective ways of following up pupil absence, including persistent absence. As a result, attendance continues to improve and figures for attendance so far this year are better than the same time period in the previous year. Punctuality rates are also improving.
- Incidents of poor behaviour are logged and any follow up actions are recorded. However, there is no analysis of whether the actions taken are reducing the number of times individual pupils behave badly.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher has been in post since January but was acting deputy headteacher in the previous term. The headteacher has quickly put in place good systems for checking on the day to day work and effectiveness of the school and knows exactly what needs to be done to improve the school further. Improvement plans are in place, but leaders do not yet make full use of these plans to drive through, in a short amount of time, the improvements which are needed in the school. As a result, improvements are not yet reviewed regularly enough to check their impact on raising achievement. Lesson observations are beginning to be carried out quite frequently by the headteacher, but any areas for improvement are not followed up to see if the advice has been acted upon by teachers.
- Mathematics and English subject leaders are new to their roles and do not fully understand how to use performance information to check the strengths and weaknesses of their subject across all classes in the school. They have carried out some monitoring and know broadly what needs to be done to continue improving achievement in the school. However, systems for checking and improving the teaching of their subjects are not fully in place and so leaders are not yet as effective in raising standards of achievement as they should be.
- The school has focused in recent times on the quality of mathematics and English teaching. As a result, teaching of other subjects is not as good as it should be. There is insufficient science, geography and history work recorded in pupils' exercise books. Expectations are often low and pupils are not expected to use their best English and mathematics skills in all subjects.

- The school meets all safeguarding requirements.
- There is evidence to show that behaviour is improving in the school and poor behaviour is limited mainly to minor disruption in lessons. The quality of teaching is improving and there is now no persistently inadequate teaching.
- Senior leaders' use of performance information is improving and regular discussions are now held with class teachers to check the progress of individual pupils so that extra teaching can be put in place where this is necessary.
- Teachers have been set relevant and challenging targets to improve and the school appraisal policy links the performance of teachers to the pay they receive.
- The headteacher and the newly appointed special educational needs co-coordinator have acted quickly to ensure pupils are receiving equal opportunities. A variety of outside agencies is involved in supporting pupils in the school and pupils of all abilities are increasingly well supported in lessons. Teaching assistants have received training in order to deliver some new support strategies to help pupils improve their numeracy and literacy skills.
- Cultural education is effective in the school with opportunities for pupils to learn about different ways of life and take part in the arts and music. For example, Year 3 pupils are being taught to play the violin and an assembly seen during the inspection celebrated the Chinese New Year. Social education is improving and pupils play well, together, outside on the playground. Spiritual and moral education is not as effective. There are too few opportunities for pupils to think and reflect, including in the daily assembly, and some pupils' behaviour in lessons indicates that they do not have a strong enough sense of right and wrong.
- Primary school sports funding is being used for specialist sports teaching and plans are in place to expand this to include gymnastics coaching. Currently, the school has no means of checking how many pupils are benefiting from this funding. The one physical education lesson observed during the inspection indicates that teachers might benefit from training in the delivery of high-quality physical education lessons.
- Only a small number of parents completed the online questionnaire, Parent View, and most of these were positive about the work of the school. Parents questioned by inspectors as they dropped their children at the school gate said they were pleased with the school and liked the improvements which have been made recently.
- Local authority support has been effective in helping the school to improve. For example, the local authority organised temporary leadership of the school until the new headteacher was appointed. The headteacher is very open to receiving help from the local authority and also from neighbouring schools. As a result, advice has been given by a local authority adviser to help improve behaviour management and support has been brokered from a local successful school so that the quality of teaching can continue to improve. This has led to staff being able to work alongside good and outstanding teachers from this local school. The school is also taking part in The Range Project which helps teachers to analyse how pupils can be helped to make the best possible progress in class.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Almost all of the governors who make up the governing body were appointed in September 2013. They have brought a range of skills and experience to the governance of the school

which includes leadership in the fields of education, finance and human resources.

- The governors have quickly got to know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and have an accurate knowledge of school performance information as well as the quality of teaching. They have gained this knowledge through the good quality information provided by the headteacher and through using key documents such as the data dashboard.
- Governors have successfully recruited and appointed the new headteacher and have very recently appointed a new deputy headteacher. They have allocated funds to allow the deputy headteacher to be non-class based so he can contribute to raising achievement, particularly in mathematics, and work with teachers to improve their practice generally.
- They have set challenging performance management objectives for the headteacher and are fully aware that they need to review, urgently, the way the pupil premium is spent to ensure it is focussed on helping to raise the achievement of eligible pupils. Governors are confident, forthright and passionate about the school. They know the school requires improvement and are determined to bring this about in a short time.

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	131505
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	430619

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	182
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michelle Gardner
Headteacher	Louise Shuttleworth
Date of previous school inspection	4 December 2012
Telephone number	01438 235550
Fax number	01438 235559
Email address	admin@featherstonewood.herts.sch.uk

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