

Bluebell Primary School

Lovelace Road, Norwich, NR4 7DS

Inspection dates 11–12 February 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		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 make inconsistent progress across the school. Other than in Years 5 and 6, too few pupils make good or better progress.
- Extended staff absence over several years has had a profound and negative impact upon pupils' learning.
- Too many activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage do not interest children and they learn too slowly.
- Teachers do not always pitch the work at the right level and some of it is too easy.
- Teachers' marking does not consistently give pupils clear guidance on how they can improve their work.
- Teachers' expectations of the quality of pupils' written work are not always high enough. Pupils do not write at length in subjects other than English.
- Teachers cause confusion because they do not all teach phonics in the same way.
- Attendance is below average.
- The roles and impact of newer phase and subject leaders have not yet been fully developed.
- The planned monitoring programme has yet to be fully implemented.
- Too little time is allocated to subjects outside of English and mathematics.

The school has the following strengths

- Most pupils display positive attitudes to learning, behave well and feel safe.
- Standards have risen to be broadly average at the end of Year 6. Most pupils make good progress in Years 5 and 6.
- Provision in the specialist resource base is good. Pupils with more challenging special educational needs in the main school generally do well.
- Senior leaders and governors are committed to improving the school further. Systems to manage teachers' performance are now good.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 16 lessons, six of which were seen together with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, senior and subject leaders, the school's intervention advisor and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 13 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 18 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Inspectors also took account of a recent survey of parental opinion carried out by the school.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of school documents, including records of the school's checks on the quality of teaching, the sports development plan, the school improvement plan and records relating to behaviour, attendance, safeguarding and pupils' progress. They also looked closely at pupils' written work from the current school year, and listened to pupils reading.

Inspection team

George Logan, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Isobel Randall

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Bluebell Primary School is an average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is slightly above average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- Pupils join and leave the school much more frequently than is normally the case.
- The school includes specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs. It hosts a specialist resource base for 10 pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. Currently five pupils from Year 1 to Year 5 are on the school's roll, with two other pupils, still on the rolls of their home schools, attending on an assessment basis. The majority of these pupils have statements of special educational need.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those with a parent in the armed services) is well above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school offers a daily breakfast club. This is managed by the governing body and was reviewed as part of this inspection.
- For some time, the school has experienced high levels of extended staff absence. At the time of the inspection, four teaching staff were on extended periods of absence.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that pupils make consistently good or better progress and reach higher standards at the end of Year 6, by ensuring that:
 - teachers have higher expectations of what all groups of pupils can do, and plan carefully to meet the needs of the full range of pupils within their classes
 - teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage engages and motivates children, moving their learning on more rapidly
 - all staff involved in the teaching of phonics adhere to the same practice, particularly in pronunciation, to avoid confusion for pupils
 - marking is consistently effective in driving rapid improvement in pupils' work
 - teachers set higher expectations of the quality of pupils' handwriting and written work
 - teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to practise their writing and mathematical skills in other subjects.
- Ensure that ongoing efforts to improve pupils' attendance are sustained so that a greater proportion of pupils record at least average attendance.
- Improve the effectiveness of the school's leaders at all levels by:
 - developing the leadership roles so that recently-appointed phase and subject leaders have a greater impact on teaching and pupils' achievement
 - implementing the recently-devised monitoring programme
 - closely checking, in conjunction with the local authority, all instances of staff absence, so that the impact on pupils' learning is minimised

- increasing the range of subjects and opportunities to enrich pupils' learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Achievement is not yet good because pupils do not make sufficiently consistent or rapid progress across the school. This reflects, largely, the impact of the high level of staff absence over time. This has particularly affected pupils in Years 1 and 2.
- Other than in Year 6, not enough priority has been given to pupils producing high-quality written work. The narrowness of the curriculum has meant that pupils have not practised their emerging writing skills sufficiently broadly or at a high enough level.
- Pupils' overall attainment by the end of Year 6, which has typically been below average, improved significantly in 2013. Pupils reached broadly average standards overall, although attainment was weaker in writing. The proportion of pupils reaching or exceeding Level 5 was in line with the national average in all subjects, although no pupils attained the challenging Level 6. Similar outcomes are predicted for 2014, reflecting greater rigour and stability in teaching in Years 5 and 6.
- Typically, pupils in their last two years make reasonable, and improving, progress. Elsewhere in the school, however, progress is slower and varies between year-groups and across subjects.
- The school carefully checks the progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and evaluates the provision made. Only limited data was available for analysis. However, pupils with higher levels of need, and receiving more effectively targeted support and interventions, typically make more rapid progress than those with lesser needs.
- Pupils in the specialist resource base make good progress from their starting points and as a result of skilled specialist teaching that takes account of their individual learning needs. Staff ensure that these pupils extend their basic skills in literacy and numeracy, but also give priority to the development of their social skills, so that they become increasingly aware of the needs and responses of others.
- Children enter the Nursery with levels of development well below those typical for their age. Children make limited progress through the Nursery and Reception years. Their standards on entry to Year 1 are still below those normally found, particularly in language and literacy.
- The proportion of pupils in Year 1 reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check in 2013 was close to the national average and significantly higher than in 2012. The teaching of phonics (the linking of sounds and letters) and support for reading have improved, but there are still inconsistencies in current practice, particularly in communicating letter sounds.
- Pupils currently make close to the expected progress in Years 1 and 2. Overall standards at the end of Year 2 rose between 2012 and 2013, although they were still below average. The proportion of pupils reaching Level 3 is below average, especially in mathematics.
- In 2013, the pupils in Year 6 supported by pupil premium funding were the equivalent of two terms behind their classmates in English and mathematics. This group of pupils throughout the school are currently making progress in English and mathematics that is close to that of other pupils.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Over time, the quality of teaching has varied and efforts to accelerate pupils' progress have been compromised by repeated long-term absences. Consequently, teaching requires improvement.
- Although some good teaching was observed, too many pockets of weak teaching still exist. Teachers do not yet consistently challenge pupils to work at higher levels. Pupils' handwriting and written work, other than in Year 6, is not always produced with sufficient care. The school has focused on coaching individual teachers and improvements are beginning to come through.
- The school has implemented agreed systems for checking and improving pupils' progress. However, inconsistencies in teachers' practice mean that effective written marking in some books, with guidance about the improvements needed, is seldom replicated elsewhere. Pupils' responses to marking are generally superficial.
- Teaching in the Nursery and Reception years does not always capture children's interest. The activities planned do not always engage children fully and adult intervention to promote learning is not always effective. Children have too few opportunities to develop the skills needed for writing.
- Regular checking on pupils' progress and carefully targeted help for pupils supported through pupil premium funding means that the progress of this group of pupils is more consistent and is now good.
- The teaching of reading is improving. With recent staff changes, however, the teaching of phonics has become inconsistent. The school recognises the need to refresh staff skills in this area.
- When teaching is at its best, the pace of learning is brisk. In a successful mathematics lesson, pupils in Year 6 were reinforcing their skills in multiplication and problem solving. The opening activities engaged pupils well. Pupils got to work quickly on tasks which were well-matched to their prior learning. Pupils maintained their attention well, recording work neatly.
- Teaching in the specialist resource base is highly effective. Support staff and teachers are dedicated and skilled at providing activities that enable pupils to make faster progress than that made by other pupils.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- Behaviour and safety are not yet good overall because attendance remains stubbornly below average, despite many efforts to improve it. Improvements tend to be short-term and are often adversely affected by the high turnover of pupils.
- The behaviour of pupils is good. During the inspection they were polite and courteous. Disruption to lessons is rare. Pupils feel that behaviour is generally good, although a few pupils find it difficult to manage their behaviour. They also feel that bullying is rare. They recognise that bullying may take many forms, but are confident that any incidents will be tackled quickly by adults. Some parents, in the parental survey, and in messages sent to the inspector, doubt the school's commitment to confront such issues. No evidence seen, however, to support their views.

- Pupils do what is asked of them and their attitudes to learning tend to be compliant, rather than enthusiastic. When teachers are themselves motivated and set high expectations, pupils' love of learning is more evident.
- Staff in the specialist resource base work hard to ensure that their pupils, as far as possible, learn to manage their own behaviour and to be responsive to the needs of others.
- Exclusions have reduced significantly in the last two years and there are now very few. The school's behaviour management systems are effective and ensure a consistent response to any issues.
- Pupils eagerly take on responsibilities which contribute to the life of the school, such as acting as peer mediators in the playground.
- The school's work to keep people safe and secure is good. Despite some parental concerns, pupils themselves said that they feel safe in school. Pupils have a good appreciation of a range of risks. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe in various circumstances, such as when using social media, and are well prepared for secondary school.
- Pupils who arrive early at school benefit from good provision in the well-managed breakfast club.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The appointment of new phase leaders and a new deputy headteacher has provided the opportunity to redefine roles and responsibilities within the leadership team. As yet, there has been insufficient time to develop the skills these staff need to fulfil these roles to their full extent. The leadership of the specialist resource base is good.
- Until the recent restructuring, checks on the work of the school largely fell to the headteacher. A monitoring programme has now been established, though it has not yet been fully implemented. Although staff absence remains an issue, the school is now better placed to manage it so that the impact on pupils' learning is less.
- There are weaknesses in the curriculum. Time for subjects other than literacy and numeracy has been squeezed, with only limited evidence of pupils learning other subjects, for example science, history and geography. Pupils do not practice or develop their writing and mathematical skills in other subjects.
- The school promotes pupils' social and moral development well. Spiritual and cultural links are less prominent. The school works hard to engage with parents and carers, often with limited response.
- Checks on the quality of teaching and learning are now more focused upon pupils' achievement. Senior leaders look closely at how much progress groups and individuals are making and identify the gaps in their knowledge and understanding.
- Some subject leaders have undertaken extensive training and now have a clear understanding of the weaknesses in their subjects. They are implementing improvement plans, support their colleagues and are beginning to show a greater impact on improving achievement.

- The school's view of its performance is realistic. Current weaknesses are accurately identified. The headteacher's evaluation of teaching during the inspection was accurate.
- An improved performance management system ensures a closer link between teachers' performance and pay increases. School leaders require evidence of the impact of teachers' work, so that only effective teachers qualify for higher pay.
- School leaders check the impact of pupil premium funding closely. They constantly review the allocation of funding to ensure that it brings about better learning. This approach is supporting faster progress among the pupils receiving this support.
- Use of the primary school sports funding is carefully planned. The school has a sustainable plan to improve the quality of sports coaching and pupils' health through improving staff coaching skills. Plans include the introduction of new clubs, including dance and netball.
- Recent support from the local authority has been good. The school is working closely with a consultant to improve teaching and to extend the capacity of leaders to bring about sustained improvements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance has improved. Governors bring expertise, skills and an understanding of education to the school and ensure that it has an increasingly clear strategic direction. The governing body has reorganised governors' responsibilities and has commissioned its own review of governance. Governors willingly undertake training and are involved in the school's self-evaluation and development planning. They have a growing understanding of school and national data and can compare the school's performance with that of others. They are effective in holding school leaders to account, offering regular challenge and support. They have, for example, ensured that funds are available to release the deputy headteacher from class responsibilities, to focus on improving teaching. Governors are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity, tackling discrimination and promoting good relationships. They have a good understanding of the quality of teaching. Pay increases are closely aligned to evidence about teachers' effectiveness. Governors regularly evaluate the impact of decisions about the use of pupil premium funding to close gaps in pupils' achievement. The governing body ensures that safeguarding arrangements meet national requirements. All statutory duties are met.

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	134942
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	430773

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	249
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jane Rolph
Headteacher	Trudi Sharred
Date of previous school inspection	14 June 2012
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