

Alexandra Park Primary School

Bombay Road, Edgeley, Stockport, Cheshire, SK3 9RF

Inspection dates 19–20 February 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.

- Pupils are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This is an improving school that is meeting its aim in enabling pupils to become 'confident and successful learners' in a safe and happy environment.
- Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. Lessons start promptly and children are eager to learn because they love their teachers and look forward to the interesting and exciting learning activities that are planned.
- The skills of well-trained teaching assistants make an effective contribution to pupils' improving rates of progress across the school.
- Behaviour and safety are good and pupils' attitudes to learning are often excellent. They get along well and care for each other.
- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is supported well by a strong and able leadership team and a dedicated governing body. The school works in close partnership with parents who are overwhelmingly positive about the school and what it does for their children.
- Good leadership of teaching and learning is enhanced by the sharing of good practice. The good range of professional development opportunities provided are having a positive impact on the continuous improvement of teaching.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils' overall achievement in reading, writing and mathematics is not outstanding, because the progress they make from their starting points is not better than good.
- The quality of marking and written advice to pupils is not always good enough across the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 18 lessons, 7 phonics (letters and the sounds they make) teaching sessions and made several other visits to classrooms and sessions where pupils were being taught in small, specific groups. Four of the lessons were observed jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. Almost all teachers and teaching assistants were observed, either in class lessons or smaller group work.
- Inspectors met with several randomly selected groups of pupils and also talked with pupils about their work in lessons and informally around the school, including at break times.
- They took account of 48 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and 26 questionnaires completed by staff.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the leadership team and other staff, the local authority school's improvement adviser and six members of the governing body.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's review of its own performance, development plans, information about the progress made by pupils currently and in the recent past, minutes of governing body meetings and policies relating to the safeguarding of pupils.

Inspection team

Marguerite Murphy, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Bimla Kumari	Additional Inspector
Maureen Coleman	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Alexandra Park is a larger than average sized primary school.
- The vast majority of pupils is from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is just below average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium is just above average. (The pupil premium is additional government funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children that are looked after by the local authority.)
- The school provides care for pupils who attend its breakfast club that is run by school staff.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the standards that pupils reach and improve their achievement in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - building on the improvements already made in the quality of teaching so that a greater proportion is outstanding
 - making sure that this results in more pupils making rapid and sustained progress from their starting points
 - ensuring that marking and advice to pupils is consistently effective in providing clear targets that are followed up to check that improvements have been made.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The majority of children in the Reception classes enter the school with overall skills that are at or below those typical for their age. This varies from year to year due to differences in the proportion of children who have additional needs or are potentially vulnerable. Weaker skills in communication and language are most often evident. Children make good progress to prepare them well for Key Stage 1.
- For the last four years, the standards that pupils reach have been at or marginally below national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards are now rising because teachers expect more of pupils and the quality of teaching has improved, particularly the teaching of letters and the sounds they make (phonics). Stringent measures put in place to improve pupils' phonic skills from Reception up to Year 4 are really paying dividends and gaps in reading standards are closing successfully across the school, including for those pupils who are supported through the pupil premium funding.
- In all of the phonics sessions observed, both teachers and teaching assistants displayed very good knowledge and skills as a result of effective whole-staff training. Pupils are making good progress in phonics and the development of reading skills in general across all key stages, whatever their ability or circumstances. Pupils speak animatedly about their reading and writing, are proud of how well they are doing and demonstrate that the majority reads widely and often both in and out of school.
- Leaders' analysis and case study evidence demonstrate that the standards and progress of pupils at the end of Year 6 in 2013 was affected by a number of unusual circumstances. This included a late influx of several new entrants to the school as well as specific issues affecting a few individuals. Consequently several pupils, including some who were eligible for free school meals or had special educational needs, just missed their expected progress targets in mathematics and, to a lesser degree, in reading and writing.
- This was not typical and is at odds with the good and sometimes outstanding progress and the improved levels of attainment evident in pupils' workbooks in both Year 6 classes now. The most-able pupils are also on track this year to achieve the higher levels of which they are capable. This is also the case now for the most-able pupils throughout the school. Leaders and governors are monitoring the Year 4 classes particularly closely due to their lower standards in the past, and well-focused actions are in place to enable them to catch up.
- Pupils who are eligible for free school meals make similarly good progress to that of their peers. Pupils who are less able or have special educational needs also make good progress, helped by the additional and high quality support provided for them. All staff are passionate about ensuring that equality of opportunity is built into everything that they do, and pupils know that each one of them is equally precious and valued as an individual.
- Another common feature of pupils' learning across the school is the emphasis placed on encouraging them to solve problems, identify solutions and overcome difficulties. Pupils show a love of learning and are keen to share their ideas about how they could respond to a particular challenge, for example in deciding what method of calculation to use in mathematics.
- The weekly 'parents stay and read' session is much appreciated by parents and helps to emphasise the benefits of the home-school partnership on promoting pupils' confidence in and love of reading.
- Pupils speak with enthusiasm about their enjoyment and achievements across many different aspects of the school curriculum, for example in physical education, sports, art and music.

The quality of teaching is good

- Right from the Reception classes, children are encouraged to use their creativity and imagination to enhance the quality and enjoyment of their learning. Adults intervene where appropriate to

support or extend children's role-play activities or stimulate their curiosity. Children are also encouraged to reflect on what they are doing and talk about it, including their understanding of what is right and wrong. These features make a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage shows that adults have the good knowledge and skills to ensure that children's early learning experiences are very positive. They carefully observe and check what children can already do in order to plan a good range of enjoyable activities that are matched well to their needs and move their learning on.
- Teachers use questioning skills effectively to check how well pupils are grasping what they need to know, particularly to improve their skills in literacy and mathematics. This also helps teachers to decide whether adjustments are needed in subsequent lessons to remedy particular gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. This was evident, for example, in Year 2 mathematics classes when the teachers recognised that pupils needed more help with practical activities to improve their understanding of halves and quarters.
- Good use is made of a wide range of resources to support teaching and learning. For example, interactive technology is used effectively to enhance learning, while also promoting pupils' love of reading through good quality books, displays and reading areas.
- Very effective use of appropriate resources to stimulate discussion meant that Year 6 pupils could recall some key historical facts about the Second World War. Pupils of all abilities also produced some powerful and emotive poems and other pieces of writing on the theme of The Blitz. Many made excellent progress to compose an emotional farewell letter in response to their reading of *'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas'*.
- Writing skills are taught well as a result of the whole-school emphasis on improving this aspect of pupils' work. When asked about their learning, Year 3 pupils explained that 'similes can help you to imagine a picture', after looking in mirrors and describing seeing 'hair like trickling chocolate' or 'eyes as green as grass'.
- On the very few occasions that learning slows, pupils have insufficient opportunity to demonstrate their understanding, for example of mathematical investigations, through recording this in their workbooks. There is less challenge for most-able pupils and presentation and marking in books is variable. While in most classes the quality of marking, advice and reference to learning targets are good, it is not consistently so across the school.
- Pupils' confidence in using information and communication technology (ICT) to support their learning is promoted well, for example in mathematics, reading and research. Appropriate use of ICT tablet technology is evident too. Pupils, governors and parents agree that pupils enjoy the reading programme that pupils log into so that their success in reading and understanding a large number of books encourage them to 'beat their own targets'.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. In lessons and around the school pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are usually exemplary and make a positive contribution to the quality of their learning. Its full impact on the rate of progress they make is only more recently becoming evident, as it is now being matched by increasingly high quality teaching in most year groups.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. They have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and are confident that if any type of bullying did occur, it would be reported and dealt with. Pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe and well looked after by all adults. It is a clear strength of the whole culture and ethos of the school, led well by the headteacher who spends a lot of her time with the pupils and is available to talk to pupils and their parents.
- Children in the Reception classes quickly settle into the well-established routines of the indoor and outdoor learning areas. They are given ample opportunities to play and explore, learning together and from each other about how best to share, make friends and get along well together.

- Throughout the school, pupils' good levels of co-operation and willingness to help and support each other are evident and a pleasure to see in kind gestures and comments that come naturally. In a Key Stage 1 phonics group, pupils were looking at sounds that each of them had written on paper plates, matching them up to make a word; one child was keen to include a fellow pupil and was overheard saying: 'hey, it's all right, you can come with us!'
- Staff, pupils and their parents strongly express the view that behaviour in the school is good and that they would recommend the school to others. As one pupil explained, it helps them to learn well because 'in lessons we talk about our work, not about completely unrelated activities'. Another said that 'it's just the best school!'
- Pupils enjoy opportunities to take on responsibilities such as being playground pals, reading buddies, ICT buddies or members of the eco-team or school council. Pupils represent their school well and are acknowledged as being well-mannered, positive role models within the local community.
- Some pupils say that behaviour can on occasions be a little boisterous in the football and basketball 'cages' during particular playtimes. They agree that it's probably due to being competitive and as one pupil observed 'It's just that some boys become determined (to do a bit of jostling)!' Pupils on the school council are already discussing ways in which this can be tackled.
- The school works hard to promote good attendance, which is currently at least in line with the national average. Most pupils attend regularly and arrive at school on time each day. Any absences or lateness are followed up rigorously by the school and there are notable examples of where this has had a positive impact on improving the attendance rates of individual pupils. Pupils themselves understand that attendance is 'important for life!'

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior leaders have a good range of complementary skills and are passionately committed to driving forward school improvement. They have an accurate view of its strengths and areas for development and focus well on key priorities and action plans to improve all pupils' rates of progress further.
- The inspection in 2011 reported on the good progress made by staff and governors in making the transition to one primary school from the previous separate infant and junior schools. The number of pupils on roll has grown since then, with a particular increase in the last year or so, when an above average proportion of pupils entered at other than the usual times. Leaders have managed this well with minimal negative impact on the school's continuous improvement.
- The school is committed to investing in the training of high quality teachers and support staff. The professional development of all staff is enhanced by beneficial networks and other partnerships, for example with Manchester Metropolitan and Edge Hill universities. There is a very strong team spirit across the school, and as one teacher wrote: 'As a staff we are given ample opportunities to continually challenge ourselves and develop our professional skills.'
- Leadership skills are also developed well and spread across the school through training, sharing best practice and encouraging the use of initiative and research. Middle leadership is enhanced by the 'coaching teams' and lesson study approach, enabling more staff to take the lead on specific projects successfully.
- The curriculum is kept under review to ensure that it is broad, relevant and meets pupils' needs and interests. The pupils' enjoyment of lessons and their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development confirm that it is successful, and enhanced by a good range of extra activities, trips and visitors.
- The primary school sport funding is used well to help extend the existing wide range of activities that the school invests in to promote sports and healthy lifestyles. This includes regular training from a sports coordinator for the physical education subject leader and other staff, after-school activities, and participation in interschool competitions throughout the year.
- The local authority has been providing a medium level of support for the school this year to

check its progress in improving attendance and the consistency of pupils' progress in reading and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 2. In 2013, those eligible for free school meals were more than 2 terms behind other pupils in mathematics and over a term behind them in reading.

- Although pupil premium funds were allocated appropriately and led to some improvements last year, leaders have reviewed its impact and adjusted this year's plans. Consequently, there is already significant evidence that gaps are closing in the standards reached by this group of pupils compared to others in the school in reading and writing in Key Stage 1 classes.
- Leaders regularly check teachers' work through observing lessons and other activities to ensure that they meet the nationally expected Teachers' Standards that are commensurate with their career stage and salary progression. Performance targets for improvement are linked closely to the school's priorities as identified in its self-review and development plans.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has a good awareness of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, including in the quality of teaching across the school. Governors are provided with regular updates and good information from the headteacher. They understand the key messages that arise from national data on school performance and where improvements are needed. The governing body holds the headteacher to account through performance management procedures. Governors ask pertinent questions of leaders during meetings, and are keen to develop their own skills and level of challenge further. Governors are proud of their school and like to see it at work whenever they can. The link governor for literacy, for example, has visited classes and reported back to the governing body.
 - The governing body ensures that all safeguarding policies and procedures meet requirements and that the school is a safe and well-maintained environment. Governors check to see that additional funding is spent wisely, for example pupil premium and sport funding, to have a positive impact on pupils' progress.

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	135746
Local authority	Stockport
Inspection number	440900

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	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	406
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anne Trafford
Headteacher	Sarah Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2011
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