

Featherby Infant and Nursery School

Allington Road, Gillingham, ME8 6PD

Inspection dates 4–5 March 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 achieve well. Standards by the end of Year 2, when taken together, are significantly above the national average. Pupils' attainment in and enjoyment of reading is particularly strong. This gives pupils a good foundation for learning across other subjects.
- Pupil at risk of falling behind are identified early and given prompt help to catch up. As a result, all groups of pupils make consistently good progress in their learning.
- Pupils have warm relationships with adults so that they feel safe, and are cared for very well. They behave well and have positive attitudes to their learning.
- Teaching is typically good and at times outstanding. Teachers know pupils and their achievements very well. They use this information to make lessons interesting and enjoyable.
- Learning is planned effectively to promote pupils' personal development alongside their academic achievement.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and governing body have high expectations for staff and pupils. The school has successfully built on the strengths evident in the previous inspection to bring about further improvement. In particular, pupils' achievement in mathematics has improved quickly over the last two years.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Pupils' writing skills are not as well developed as they are in reading and mathematics and too few pupils reach the higher National Curriculum levels.
- Pupils do not always apply their writing skills as well in other subjects as they do in writing lessons.
- Teachers do not give pupils enough time to understand and act on the good quality advice given when they mark pupils' work. This limits the extent to which their work improves.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 20 lessons. Four of these were observed jointly with senior leaders. An inspector also carried out a series of shorter visits to lessons.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and scrutinised samples of pupils' work.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, staff and pupils, as well as with representatives of the governing body and from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 33 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, along with the outcomes of conversations with parents and carers during the inspection and the 28 questionnaire responses from staff.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including information on the progress of groups of pupils, nationally published assessment data, the school's self-evaluation, development plans, safeguarding information, and records relating to teachers' performance management.

Inspection team

Helen Hutchings, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Gianni Bianchi

Additional Inspector

Clive Reynolds

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average sized infant school.
- Most pupils are from a White British background.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support by the pupil premium is average. This is additional government funding for those pupils eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those from service families.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is high. The proportion supported at school action is average.
- A few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The Sunshine Featherby Pre-School and Out of School Club operates on the site. This is privately managed and run, and is subject to a separate inspection and report by Ofsted.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' progress and attainment in writing by making sure that teachers:
 - challenge the most-able pupils by always giving them work that is demanding enough to help them to reach the higher levels of attainment
 - develop pupils' skills more quickly by expecting the same quality of writing from pupils in other subjects as they do in discrete writing lessons
 - give pupils time to understand and act on the written comments they make in pupils' books.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils achieve well in all classes and year groups. Their books show the good progress they make in all aspects of their learning. Work is presented well, showing pupils' effective learning skills and the pride they take in their achievements.
- When children join the school in Nursery or Reception their skills and understanding, when taken together, are below the levels expected for their age. The good relationships established with families before children start school mean that they settle quickly and develop a love of learning. Children play and learn well together, so that they acquire early literacy and numeracy skills and the language of learning quickly, which prepares them well for Year 1. For example, as preparation for writing, a small group of children in Reception improved their finger manipulation by using tweezers to extract objects from 'alien jelly' which linked with their topic about space. Adults working with the group were highly effective in prompting and developing children's vocabulary and language skills.
- By the end of Year 2, pupils' attainment is above that found nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils attain particularly well in reading because the good foundations laid in Nursery and Reception are built on firmly through Key Stage 1. The consistent approaches used across the school in all areas of learning mean that no time is lost as pupils transfer from one class to the next, which helps pupils to be confident and make good progress.
- Nevertheless, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher National Curriculum levels in writing is below that found nationally because teachers do not always make sure that the tasks for the most-able pupils are sufficiently challenging from the outset.
- This year, the school has introduced new approaches to the teaching of writing which are proving effective. Pupils' good handwriting helps them to commit their thoughts to paper quickly. Work in pupils' books and the school's tracking information show that pupils are making faster progress than in previous years.
- Pupils enjoy reading and understand how success in reading helps them to research information for other subjects. They have very good knowledge of the sounds that letters make and use this confidently to work out unfamiliar words. Pupils also have a good understanding of punctuation and apply this successfully to add expression and fluency to their reading.
- The school has improved pupils' mathematics attainment over recent years. Pupils develop their skills well through practically based tasks. In a Year 1 lesson, pupils developed their understanding of managing money quickly because of the range of plastic coins available for them to handle and work out different combinations.
- The school monitors pupils' progress frequently and ensures that any pupils not making the expected progress are given prompt help and support to overcome their difficulties. The school gives a wide range of extra guidance and, when necessary, support from external agencies to ensure that any barriers to learning are reduced. Consequently, all groups of pupils make good progress, including those who are disabled or have special educational needs, those eligible for the pupil premium and the small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language. This is a reflection of the school's success in promoting equality of opportunity.
- Over the last three years, the school has systematically narrowed the achievement gap between those eligible for support through the pupil premium and their classmates. In addition to learning activities, such as small-group booster sessions, the school ensures that pupils have access to enrichment activities, such as music and after-school sport.

The quality of teaching is good

- The vast majority of parents and carers responding to Parent View agree that pupils are taught well. Inspection evidence confirms that teaching is good, with some that is outstanding.
- Teachers manage their classes well so that learning takes place in an atmosphere of respect.

They plan together well in year teams to share ideas and make learning enjoyable for pupils. Consequently, lessons are lively with pupils working effectively in groups or by themselves.

- Teachers are very knowledgeable and have high expectations of the quality of pupils' work. They explain things clearly, probe pupils' understanding and develop pupils' thinking well. New strategies are helping pupils to see their progression over a short period of time from a starting to an end point. The targets on pupils' books and on group tables are updated regularly, strengthening their sense of achievement.
- Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning, through individual support or in small groups. They use their initiative well to support pupils who are finding work challenging and to prompt pupils to work things through for themselves.
- Staff use their interactive whiteboards and visual prompts around the classroom very well to introduce and illustrate learning. Pupils then make good use of this information for reference. In a story writing task, pupils consulted a nearby display to help them ensure that their spelling was accurate. Pupils' information technology skills are well-developed because they regularly use computers.
- Pupils develop good study skills because they are required to do things for themselves. For example, they record and then review their learning against what the teacher has expected. Pupils routinely check their work for accuracy towards the end of a lesson.
- Teachers mark work regularly and carefully, particularly in writing and mathematics. Occasionally, teachers do not show the same high expectations for the quality of writing when pupils write in other subjects. Incorrect spellings are not always pointed out. Pupils know that the comments teachers make are intended to help them to improve their work. There are some examples of pupils correcting work or carrying out additional tasks showing that they have understood the advice given when teachers mark work, but this practice is not consistently applied across the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They get on well together so that there is a positive ethos in lessons and around the school, and they play happily together in the playground. They enjoy their time together, for example, when having lunch which helps pupils to develop socially.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning. They show this in the pride they take in their work and good presentation in their books.
- In lessons, pupils respond quickly to teachers' instructions so that no time is lost between different activities. They mostly concentrate well throughout the whole lesson. For example, in a lesson where pupils were making pictures based on the work of Kandinsky, they retained high levels of concentration and spoke clearly about complex elements of their drawing. Just occasionally, when pupils are not challenged enough by the work or if it is too difficult, they begin to chat and need to be reminded to return to work.
- Pupils are sensitive to the needs of those who sometimes find it more difficult to behave well. The school is very effective in supporting those with particular behavioural difficulties, and works closely with their families.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and that rules are in place to make life pleasant for everyone. Records show that incidents of bullying or the use of racist language are extremely rare, showing the school's effectiveness in creating a harmonious community. Pupils understand about different types of bullying. During the inspection, pupils attended workshops to raise their awareness of the dangers they may face when using the internet and they explained fully how to stay safe.
- Most parents, carers and staff agree that pupils are happy and behave well in school.
- Attendance is broadly in line with the national average. Targeted support for identified families has been successful in reducing the levels of persistent absence to below average levels.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is highly regarded by staff and governors for the way in which she encourages teamwork and consistency of approach across the school. As such, school morale is high and staff and pupils are justly proud of their work.
- Senior leaders check the quality of teaching thoroughly in a way which encourages teachers and teaching assistants to reflect on the impact of their work and identify for themselves how to improve further. There are increasing opportunities for staff to observe one another to share best practice. Regular reviews of pupils' progress are used effectively to evaluate the success of the school's approaches.
- Because staff constantly evaluate the school's effectiveness, they are confident about the school's strengths but also aware of where improvements are needed. Staff are outward looking so that when given the opportunity earlier in the academic year to be part of an initiative to research approaches to the teaching of writing, they embraced it with open arms as a means of addressing an area already identified for whole-school development.
- The curriculum is designed around a series of topics of interest to pupils. It develops pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills well. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through assemblies, circle time and a variety of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. For example, the school choir won a local competition during the week of the inspection.
- The school has been very careful in its planning of the use of additional funding to support physical education and sport. It is being used effectively to provide specialist coaching which is increasing participation in after-school sport, helping pupils to develop healthier lifestyles and improve their physical well-being. Specialist staff are helping teachers to plan and teach physical education lessons. This is improving lessons for pupils and also improving staff skills.
- As part of its light touch support for the school, the local authority has provided regular support for the school's self-evaluation and encouraged collaboration among schools locally. It is giving financial support for the writing initiative, undertaken in partnership with a teaching school locally.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has a secure understanding of the quality of the school's work. Governors understand the information about pupils' performance and how the school performs in comparison with other schools nationally. They know about the quality of teaching and ensure that teachers' targets are set, reviewed and linked to salary rewards. Governors keep their own work under review and are currently considering ways in which the governing body could become even more effective. Governors hold the school to account for its academic performance and ensure that additional funding is planned for and used wisely, for example pupil premium and sports funding. Finances are managed well. Governors have an acute sense of responsibility for the safety of pupils and staff, and ensure that safeguarding requirements meet all national requirements.

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	118421
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	441242

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	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	361
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Fautley
Headteacher	Jane Thompson
Date of previous school inspection	20–21 September 2010
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