

Birkdale Primary School

Matlock Road, Birkdale, Southport, Merseyside, PR8 4EL

Inspection dates 5–6 March 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		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Achievement is good. From starting points that are just below average, pupils make good progress and by the time they leave Year 6, attainment is typically in line with the national average and, in mathematics, just above that level.
- Teaching is good. Teachers have excellent relationships with pupils and plan lessons that help to make learning interesting.
- Pupils are polite and friendly and behave well in class and at break times. Attendance is improving because pupils enjoy coming to school.
- Pupils report that they feel very safe and happy in school. This is because the school's work to keep children safe and well cared for is outstanding.
- Parents are extremely supportive of the school and almost all say they would recommend the school to another parent.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well and they benefit from a curriculum that provides them with a good range of experiences.
- Staff morale is high and staff are proud to be part of the school community.
- The inspirational leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by skilled senior leaders, is making sure that the school has successfully addressed a slight dip in performance and that teaching and pupils' achievement are moving forward strongly.
- Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The proportion of pupils making better than expected progress is not above average.
- Teachers' marking does not consistently help pupils to know what they need to do to improve their work, and where it does, pupils do not always respond to the advice given.
- Not all the support offered by teaching assistants is effective in helping pupils to make the best possible progress.
- It sometimes takes too long for the most able pupils to move on to the more challenging work planned for them.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 23 lessons or parts of lessons, of which one was a joint observation with the headteacher.
- Inspectors listened to pupils reading in Key Stages 1 and 2, and held meetings with pupils drawn from across Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and other leaders, including subject leaders, the Early Years Foundation Stage coordinator and the special educational needs coordinator. Inspectors met with a small group of governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors undertook a scrutiny of pupils' current work.
- A range of other evidence was also considered by inspectors. This included the school's evaluation of its own performance, development planning, records of teachers' performance management, data about the achievement of pupils currently in the school, governing body information and records relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.
- Inspectors took account of 53 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and a number of parents shared their views of the school with inspectors during the inspection.
- Inspectors analysed 42 returns by staff to the inspection questionnaire.

Inspection team

Neil Dixon, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Geoffrey Yates

Additional Inspector

Hilary Ward

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is broadly average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium is just below average. The pupil premium is additional funding to support pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment.
- The school currently holds a number of awards, including Healthy School accreditation and the International Schools Award.
- A programme of significant redevelopment of the school building and play areas has recently been completed.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding, thereby increasing the proportion of pupils making more than expected progress, by:
 - ensuring that marking provides pupils with clear guidance on how to improve their work, and that pupils respond to this advice
 - ensuring that support provided by teaching assistants is consistently effective and helps pupils to make the best possible progress
 - ensuring that the most able pupils are always given enough time to tackle work that challenges them to reach the highest levels.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start school with skills and knowledge that are just below those expected for their age, especially in communication and language. They get off to an excellent start in the Nursery class where a strong focus on developing children's speaking, listening and understanding of stories has a very positive impact on children's progress. Children continue to progress well in the Reception class.
- Progress in Key Stage 1 is good and by the end of Year 2, pupils typically attain levels that are broadly in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Although results at the end of Year 6 dipped slightly in 2013, pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is typically at least in line with the national average and, particularly in mathematics, regularly just above that level. This represents good progress over time from pupils' individual starting points.
- The school's detailed information about pupils' attainment and progress, confirmed by the quality of pupils' current work, shows that attainment in Key Stage 2 is rising. This is as a result of leaders' increasingly robust tracking of the performance of all groups of pupils, accurate analysis of areas that could be improved, and effective strategies that have been put in place to bring about these improvements.
- Pupils' progress in reading is good. The youngest children quickly develop an impressive understanding of books and stories, and the school teaches phonics (the sounds that letters make.) successfully. As a result, by the end of Year 2, pupils confidently use their knowledge of phonics to help them decode new words.
- Pupils make good progress in writing. Pupils in Key Stage 1 show a good understanding of key aspects of punctuation and grammar, such as speech marks and exclamation marks, and this good progress continues across Key Stage 2.
- Achievement in mathematics is good. Pupils use their basic numeracy skills well and are confident when tackling problem-solving tasks. When faced with a concept that they find difficult, such as ordering decimals in a Year 4 class, pupils show positive attitudes to learning in their determination to get to the right answer.
- Overall, the most able pupils make good progress and by the time they leave the school, the proportion achieving the higher Level 5 is similar to that found nationally. However, sometimes the most able pupils are not given the chance to move on to more challenging work as soon as they are ready, which stops them making more than the expected amount of progress. As a result, by the time they leave the school only a small number reach the highest level (Level 6.)
- All groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs or disabilities, are now making good progress and achieve well. Where there has been some variability in the progress made by certain groups, such as boys' progress in reading, the school has identified the issue and taken effective steps to address it. This is indicative of the school's effective promotion of equal opportunities.
- The funding for pupils eligible for the pupil premium is being used increasingly effectively, so that the attainment and progress of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national average, and in some cases in Key Stage 1 these pupils are performing slightly better than their peers nationally.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good overall, and during the inspection, some examples were seen where pupils made rapid progress in their learning as a result of outstanding teaching.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, there is a good balance of activities that are directed by adults and ones that children choose for themselves. Staff effectively support children in developing their language, communication and early reading skills and the modelling of language

by staff helps to widen children's vocabulary. As a result, children quickly develop a good knowledge of books and stories.

- Where pupils' learning is good or better, they respond very well to high expectations, and working at tasks that help them to make at least good progress. They enjoy being challenged by probing questions to deepen their understanding. This was evident when pupils enthusiastically took on the role of Florence Nightingale, using an impressive range of vocabulary to describe her views and emotions. They clearly enjoyed their learning and the progress they made was outstanding.
- Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge across the curriculum. Pupils benefit from this and from working on tasks which interest, involve and challenge them, whatever their ability.
- Teaching assistants generally provide good and sometimes excellent support for pupils' learning, and have consistently positive relationships with the pupils with whom they work. However, at times when teaching assistants' subject knowledge is less secure, their support is not as effective as it could be in moving pupils' learning forward.
- Improvements that leaders have put in place have ensured that reading is now taught effectively, starting with instilling an interest in books and reading that begins in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the successful teaching of phonics. Parents are also encouraged to support children's reading and the school website provides helpful suggestions as to how this can be done.
- Although the quality of marking is improving, pupils are not always clear about how they can improve their work, or they do not take sufficient notice of such advice when it is given. As a result, marking does not accelerate pupils' progress as much as it could do.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite and welcoming. They say that poor behaviour in their school is very unusual and that, 'Pupils here behave well.'
- At lunchtimes and playtimes, pupils get on well with each other. They enjoy using the well-equipped outdoor playground, where they can access an exciting range of exercise equipment, and the new roof-top 'playdeck', which provides an ingenious solution to the school's previous lack of outdoor space.
- Pupils show positive attitudes to learning. They take a pride in their work, as is evidenced by a range of attractive displays of art and written work around the school. Pupils listen well to teachers' explanations and this helps them to improve their work. However, they do not consistently respond as carefully to written comments in their books.
- Behaviour in lessons is good overall, and in lessons where pupils are most engaged and challenged to make speedy progress, it is excellent. When pupils have to wait before moving on to more challenging tasks they sometimes lose focus, and this stops them making the most rapid progress.
- Attendance over time has been broadly average, but it is now improving as a result of the school's effective promotion of the importance of good attendance. Pupils enjoy coming to school, as can be seen from one pupil's comment that, 'I wanted to come to school when it was the half-term holiday.'
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils say that they feel very safe in the school and can confidently explain how to keep themselves safe in different situations, including when using the internet.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of different forms of bullying, including name-calling and racist bullying, but say that incidents of bullying in their school are extremely rare. All are confident that the adults in school would deal effectively with any problems or concerns that they may have, which is indicative of the very high level of care provided by the school.
- Parents' responses to the 'Parent View' online survey and conversations with inspectors during the inspection strongly indicate that parents are extremely pleased with the standard of behaviour and safety in the school.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, very ably supported by both recently appointed and more established senior leaders, has a clear vision for the school and is determined to make the school the best that it can be. He has the strong support of the staff, governors and parents. One staff member commented that, 'We are striving to make this a school to be proud of.' Improvements that leaders have already brought about show that the school is well on its way to achieving that ambition.
- School leaders have a good understanding of the strengths of the school and where it could do better, supported by improvements in the detail of systems used to track the performance of different groups of pupils. The school development plan is based on a thorough knowledge of the school's performance and correctly identifies key priorities for improvement.
- Regular checks are made on the quality and impact of teaching and the headteacher has an accurate view of the strengths in teaching across the school and aspects where it could be improved. As a result of checks made, senior leaders identified the need to increase the impact of teachers' marking on pupils' progress, although strategies put in place are not yet fully embedded in all classes.
- The headteacher effectively ensures that targets set for teachers' performance are linked to pupil progress and attainment, and there is a clear link between teachers' pay and performance.
- Senior leaders have involved the wider school community in school improvement activities, such as developing a parent-led 'Reading Intervention Group' to support pupils' reading. This is beginning to have an impact on pupils' confidence and attainment in reading and has also successfully created a shared sense of purpose across the school.
- The school's imaginative curriculum provides pupils with a broad range of interesting learning experiences that are enhanced by links to visiting arts organisations and a rich international dimension, recognised by the International Schools Award.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils show a strong sense of the need to care for the environment, have completed a number of creative projects based around ecological themes and benefit from links with the local 'Eco-Centre'.
- The school makes effective use of the additional funding for primary school sport. A specialist teacher has been employed and this also provides ongoing training for school staff. In addition, close links with the school's local semi-professional football club have provided pupils with further opportunities to take part in sports activities and develop new skills.
- The local authority provides effective guidance to the school through 'light touch' support that recognises the skills of senior leaders and their ability to move the school forward themselves.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The effectiveness of governance has increased since the last inspection and is now good. Governors have a good understanding of the school's performance and provide appropriate challenge to school leaders. They have a good knowledge of data relating to pupils' attainment.
 - Governors, working closely with senior leaders, ensure that the school's finances are managed well and enhance the quality of learning for pupils. Recent significant remodelling and building work have created an attractive and practical learning environment of which staff and pupils are rightly proud.
 - Well-planned appointments to teaching and leadership positions are having a positive impact on pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching across the school and have corrected a dip in performance since the last inspection.
 - Governors are aware of how pupil premium funding is used and the impact that it is having on pupils' progress. They ensure that the statutory duties of the governing body are fulfilled, particularly with regard to safeguarding and checks on procedures for managing teachers' performance.

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	104860
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	440705

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	378
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Hands
Headteacher	Nick Sheeran
Date of previous school inspection	27 November 2008
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