

# Mary Exton Junior Mixed and Infant School

St Michael's Road, Hitchin, SG4 0QA

**Inspection dates** 20–21 March 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- The headteacher and school leaders have high ambitions for pupils and the school. This contributes in no small measure to the pupils' well-above-average attainment, particularly in reading.
- The strong and effective group of governors work closely with the headteacher and staff to raise standards. They are thoughtful and reflective, and use rigorous procedures for checking on the school's performance, including the quality of teaching.
- Good teaching is leading to pupils making good progress. Teachers make work interesting and ask pupils probing questions to make them think hard, and to reflect on how well they are doing and where improvements can be made.
- The school strongly supports the pupils' personal development. They are challenged to develop a love of learning and to take risks without fear of failure.
- Pupils embrace the school's values and rules by conducting themselves thoughtfully at all times. They are very polite, well-mannered and considerate of others.
- Pupils are highly motivated, work hard and answer questions enthusiastically. They take great pride in their work, as shown by its neat presentation and the conscientious way many respond to their teacher's marking.
- Pupils feel very safe and happy in school. Their enjoyment of school and learning is reflected in high attendance levels.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally teachers do not set work at the right level to meet the needs of the pupils or act quickly enough to adjust the work when this becomes apparent.
- Adults do not always help the children in Reception to make the most of activities provided, particularly when working outside.
- School leaders do not always sharply identify why teaching is not better or take steps for its rapid improvement.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 15 lessons, three of which were seen together with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. In each of these lessons inspectors examined the work in pupils' books.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils, school staff and members of the governing body, including the Chair, and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 53 responses to the online parent questionnaire, Parent View, and held informal discussions with parents and carers at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents including the school's own information on the pupils' current progress, planning and monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents relating to safeguarding.
- Inspectors listened to the reading of a sample of pupils in Year 2.

## Inspection team

Martin Beale, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Angela Savill

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is average in size.
- The large majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for funding through the pupil premium is well below average. The extra money applies in this school to pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is well below average and falling.
- The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school hosts a privately-run after-school club called Fiona's Sparklers. This provision is inspected separately.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve teaching by making sure that teachers:
  - set work that is appropriate for different pupils and challenges them to do their best
  - check carefully that children and pupils understand what they are being taught, and adjust the lesson activities if necessary to move their learning on.
- Make sure checks on the quality of teaching identify precisely what further training each individual teacher needs to improve their performance further.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils make good and improving progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Year 6 test results are consistently well above average and were highest in reading in 2013. The most able pupils make equally good progress, as reflected in the large numbers working above, and in some cases well above, the levels expected for their age in all subjects across the school.
- Children enter Reception with skills typical for their age. They make good progress in all areas of learning and are prepared well for Key Stage 1. Several children exceed levels expected for their age by the time they enter Year 1 because adults focus sharply on key skills of literacy and numeracy as well as the children's personal development.
- By the end of Year 6 the large majority of pupils' attainment in reading is at a higher level than expected for their age. Pupils read confidently and widely. Results of the phonics screening check for Year 1 pupils in 2013 were below average. The school responded by changing the way sessions where pupils learn letters and their sounds are taught. They are now taught well in Reception and Key Stage 1, resulting in pupils reading fluently. Skills acquired are built upon continually and emphasised by teachers, as seen when Year 1 pupils met new vocabulary such as 'sphere' in mathematics.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs also make good progress. They benefit from support that is carefully tailored to their individual needs. Their progress is carefully checked so that changes can be made speedily to support and guidance when needed.
- There was a gap between the Year 6 test results of those eligible for support through the pupil premium and others in the class in 2013. This amounted to more than two years in mathematics and over two terms in writing. The gap was negligible in reading. The school has adjusted its use of funding to provide more focused support for eligible pupils in lessons in order to close these gaps. As a result they are making good progress and the gaps are closing, particularly in mathematics.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Typically teaching captures the pupils' attention and enables them to learn new skills quickly in calm and well-managed classrooms. Teachers ask searching questions to make sure the most able pupils are continually challenged. Pupils continually reflect on how they are getting on against clear criteria so they can identify how to improve their work. Marking provides pupils with clear guidance on how to improve their work and meet their learning targets.
- The excellent teaching of writing in Years 4 and 6 leads to pupils making rapid gains in their learning and sustaining this over time. Both teachers show high expectations and very secure knowledge of the subject, using this to continually challenge the pupils' thinking and adapt quickly to their responses. During the inspection a cycle of short bursts of teaching new techniques was followed by pupils discussing their ideas, preparing extracts of writing together and checking around the class for further improvements before the cycle started again. This led to high quality extended pieces of writing in the subsequent lesson.
- Teaching assistants generally contribute well to learning, particularly of pupils who have special educational needs because they are briefed and used well by teachers. They make sure that pupils they support do not become dependent on them, and take the initiative to adapt work as

learning develops.

- Adults in Reception support the development of children's literacy or numeracy by giving them the chance to learn by talking through their ideas and discussing possible solutions. However, learning slows when adults do not interact effectively with children to make sure the activities are helping them to learn new things.
- Not all teachers move the older pupils' learning forward rapidly. Occasionally work set is either too easy or beyond what some pupils already know. In some cases, teachers realise that pupils find the work easy or have not understood it, but do not tackle pupils' misconceptions quickly enough to help them make good progress.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. This includes in lessons, where there is no disruption to learning, and around the school where they conduct themselves impeccably. Children in Reception are helped to understand the consequences of their behaviour, and this is reinforced as they move through the school. Pupils play happily together, making break and lunchtime very pleasant social occasions.
- Children in Reception are confident and keen to take part in activities so they can learn. This stays with them throughout the school. Pupils work together very sensibly whether when discussing ideas or working on a group activity. They are tenacious and do not give up easily even if work is hard. Pupils make a major contribution to school life through the 'Pupil Voice' groups, which are made up of pupils of all ages and led very maturely by Year 6 pupils.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Safeguarding arrangements are robust. Governors regularly check their implementation and adapt procedures if appropriate. Pupils learn how to spot and deal with risks they might face through work such as e-safety training.
- Pupils learn to recognise the different forms bullying might take and they know to speak to an adult if any problems arise that they cannot sort out amicably themselves. They report that incidents are very rare and adults deal with them swiftly. Their parents agree and are also strongly of the view that behaviour is managed well.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- The headteacher and governors share the common aim of raising the achievement of all pupils. School leaders and all staff work as one in pursuit of this goal. Subject leaders are well trained and provide expertise to drive improvement in their areas. Together they have successfully increased pupils' progress and tackled any emerging priorities swiftly.
- The school has not sought direct support from the local authority since its last inspection but makes regular use of appropriate training courses, including for governors.
- Parents have many opportunities to come into school to find out about how subjects such as phonics are taught and how they can support their children's learning at home. Parents are invited in to read on a daily basis with their children in Reception, and every Friday in Years 1 and 2. Four times each term there are 'Friday challenges' in English or mathematics for them to attend and take part in.

- Wherever possible, subjects are linked through topics and supported through trips and visitors. This makes learning enjoyable and memorable for the pupils. Themed days or weeks occur regularly, focusing particularly on English and mathematics. They also promote an understanding of other countries, their cultures and religions. Parents, representative of other cultures, visit the school to help celebrate festivals such as Chinese New Year. Links with a school in central London and another in Kenya also help pupils to be accepting and tolerant of differences, at the same time making them aware of national and international issues.
- The school uses the new primary school sport funding well to enhance its already extensive range of sports activities. This is leading to more pupils participating in sports activities, including tournaments with other schools. Specialist coaches have also been engaged to lead sessions such as in orienteering from which staff expertise is improving.
- The management of teachers' performance is linked to pupils' progress. Pay rises and promotion are only awarded if teachers meet targets for pupils' achievement. Systems for monitoring teaching are thorough and based on a variety of strategies. However, they have not always been used robustly to identify precisely where an individual teacher needs training to improve. As a result, leaders have not tackled some variations in quality across the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors bring a wide range of expertise to their roles including in finance, premises and understanding assessment data. Governors are regularly in school looking at specific issues or meeting with subject leaders. They probe past and current assessment data in detail so they can hold senior leaders to account for the school's performance. This gives them a clear picture of the school and its progress towards meeting their targets. It also enables them to question the headteacher and senior leaders carefully such as about the quality of teaching and its impact on the pupils' progress. Governors recognise that the headteacher is taking action to eliminate some variation in the quality of teaching. They are quite clear that only where teachers merit it are they rewarded. Governors keep the school's finances in good order and are fully involved in decisions over the allocation of funding such as the pupil premium and checking its impact.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117329
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	440551

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	225
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mark Beaver
<b>Headteacher</b>	Karen Ireland
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	30 June 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01462 456997
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