

Margaret Wix Primary School

High Oaks, St Albans, AL3 6EL

Inspection dates 25–26 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
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

- Not enough pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils start with average standards in these subjects, and do not achieve higher than average by the time they leave.
- Although still broadly average, standards in writing are much lower than those in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils who are supported by the pupil premium funding do not do as well as other pupils.
- Although there is some good teaching, it is not consistently good enough to ensure that all pupils achieve well.
- Work for more-able pupils is sometimes too easy. Some teachers do not check rigorously enough what pupils already know, or improve pupils' learning through clear guidance.
- Not all leaders analyse data on pupils' performance and use the results well enough to drive improvements in their areas of responsibility.

The school has the following strengths

- Children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is particularly good.
- Governors are very supportive. They have recently reviewed the way they work to make best use of their strengths and expertise.
- The headteacher and other senior leaders understand what the school needs to do to improve. Their changes to achieve this have resulted in better attendance and recent improvements to teaching and achievement.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 17 lessons or parts of lessons, nine of which were seen together with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other staff, three groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors.
- Informal discussions were held with parents and carers.
- The inspectors took account of the 27 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, the school's own parental questionnaires, individual communications from parents and 22 completed staff questionnaires.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's checks on its performance, its analysis and tracking of pupils' progress, records of behaviour and safety, school improvement plans, records relating to classroom observations and the management of staff performance, safeguarding arrangements and records of meetings of the governing body.
- The inspectors also looked at pupils' work, listened to pupils read and checked information on attendance.

Inspection team

Susan Hughes, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Westall

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are both above average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium, which is additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, have a parent in the armed forces or are in local authority care, is above average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The headteacher joined the school shortly before the previous inspection in 2011. Since then, seven new teachers and 14 new teaching assistants have been appointed. Three of the four Key Stage 2 teachers joined the school in September 2013. Six new governors have joined the governing body since the last inspection.
- The number of pupils is growing year on year, and a high proportion now join or leave during Years 1 to 6. For example, 30 new pupils have joined across Years 1 to 6 since September.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by ensuring that:
 - the work set for more-able pupils is difficult enough to enable them to make good progress
 - guidance from teachers on how pupils can improve their work is followed up to make sure they use it to speed up their learning
 - teachers ask sufficiently probing questions in lessons to check pupils' understanding and extend their learning.
- Raise achievement in writing by:
 - developing pupils' skills to write grammatically complex sentences
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to write at length in English lessons and in other subjects.
- Strengthen leadership and management by ensuring that all leaders use data rigorously to drive improvements in their areas of responsibility.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Children typically start in the Nursery and Reception classes with skills that are expected for their age, though slightly weaker in literacy and mathematics than in other areas. As teaching in these classes has improved, children now make good progress and, in September 2013, the proportion of children who started Key Stage 1 with a good level of development was above average. This means that they had stronger skills than pupils in previous years, who typically started Key Stage 1 with skills in line with those expected for their age.
- The results of the most recent Year 1 national screening check on how well pupils know phonics (the sounds that letters represent in words) were just below average. However, during the inspection, most pupils showed that they could use their phonics skills to read unfamiliar words. For example, Year 2 pupils confidently read out the design tasks the teacher had set and showed that they understood what was required of them.
- Pupils make steady progress in Key Stage 1 but are still working at average standards when they start in Key Stage 2. Last year, the overall progress that Year 6 pupils made since they left Key Stage 1 was not as good as it should have been. However, this is not the full picture. The school's data show that progress was accelerating in 2013 and most pupils made expected progress in reading and good progress in writing and mathematics during the year. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics in Key Stage 2 were broadly average.
- This year, most pupils are again making expected progress, including those who join the school partway through their primary education. Pupils in Years 4 and 5 are making good progress, especially in writing. The attainment gap between writing and other subjects is narrowing in these year groups.
- More-able pupils generally make expected progress. Occasionally, however, the work is not at the right level for them to make faster progress.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium do not make as much progress as other pupils. This means that the gap between their attainment and that of other pupils is not narrowing fast enough. In 2013, eligible pupils in Year 6 were two terms behind their classmates in writing, four terms behind in reading and five terms behind in mathematics. However, school data show that eligible pupils are currently attaining higher than in previous years and their attainment is closer to those of similar pupils nationally. Eligible pupils are now typically working between one and three terms behind other pupils.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. Their specific needs are quickly identified, and help and guidance are adjusted regularly as their needs change.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language also make good progress. The school provides a good range of activities to help them learn English, so they quickly understand what is happening in lessons. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds make at least expected progress and some make good progress.
- Progress in physical education is good, thanks to good use of the primary school sport funding. Pupils are now involved in more competitions, and have enjoyed some success in these activities.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is improving, but it is not yet consistently good across the school. Some new staff have not been in post long enough to make a strong impact on pupils' learning and achievement. Others do not always make sure that they check rigorously enough what pupils already know and how they can improve.
- In some lessons, more-able pupils are given work that is either too easy for them or is not explained clearly enough for them to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Some teachers accept simple answers to their question. This means that they do not check the depth of understanding or move pupils on in their learning. When learning is stronger, teachers ask probing questions which they often follow up with more complex ones, or ask pupils to explain their answers. In a mathematics lesson, for example, Year 6 pupils explained their strategies for finding different percentages of numbers.
- Teachers are very conscientious when marking books. They often provide helpful guidance as to how pupils can improve. However, they do not always check that the advice has been followed to make sure it helps pupils develop their learning.
- Pupils who benefit from pupil premium funding are supported in different ways to help them progress. On occasions, they benefit from individual teaching or teaching in small groups, and this is beginning to improve their achievement. The skills and capabilities of pupils who join the school partway through their primary education are promptly assessed to see if these pupils need any extra help to settle in and make progress.
- Additional adults in the classroom are used well. They are well briefed and support pupils effectively, including disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language. These pupils are helped to work alongside other pupils in the lessons but also have additional support in small groups or on a one-to-one basis. A good range of activities develop the skills they need to make good progress.
- Children get a good start to school life in the in the Nursery and Reception classes. Activities are lively and interesting. For example, during the inspection, some Nursery children were fascinated by the dinosaur book their teacher was sharing, while others played with toy dinosaurs and construction apparatus. In all activities, adults encourage children to talk about what they are doing to extend their language skills.
- Physical education is taught well. Specialist coaches lead classes, some of which the teachers join in so that they can learn techniques to use in their own lessons. During the inspection, a coach-led lesson on developing rounders skills helped pupils to improve their bowling and batting techniques.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils behave well in and around school, moving between activities in a calm, orderly manner. Pupils play together harmoniously on the playground and are friendly and considerate to each other.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning and behave well in lessons. While they find most lessons interesting, they say that sometimes lessons are boring if teachers talk for too long or go

over work they already know. However, there is very little disruption to the learning and most pupils try hard to do well.

- Pupils who find behaving difficult are well supported. Clear expectations shown by teachers and consistent use of the behaviour policy mean that, with added support, behaviour improves and these pupils settle well in lessons.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Leaders ensure that access to the building is secure, and staff are rigorously checked prior to appointment.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school and understand about keeping safe in different situation, such as when using the internet and on the roads. Older pupils spoke enthusiastically about their visit to 'Hazard Alley', where they had practical experiences of how to keep themselves safe.
- Pupils have a good understanding of what bullying is and the different forms it can take, including cyber, physical and verbal bullying. They told inspectors that the occasional incidents of bullying in school were always quickly sorted out by an adult. Parent questionnaires and letters to the inspectors confirm that they also feel that bullying is dealt with well.
- The school has worked effectively with parents to improve attendance. It is currently just above average.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders have not yet ensured that teaching is good enough to enable pupils to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Although the headteacher has taken appropriate steps to improve the quality of teaching, which is now starting to speed up progress for most pupils, standards are not yet as high as they should be.
- Senior leaders analyse data about pupils' attainment and progress to help them plan for improvement. However, not all leaders have developed their skills in using this analysis well enough to drive rapid improvement in their areas of responsibility.
- The appraisal system for checking teachers' performance, introduced last year, is contributing to the improving quality of teaching across the school. Individual targets are used by the headteacher and the governing body to measure whether pay rises and promotion are justified by results.
- Leaders in the school are reviewing how the subjects are taught. Pupils enjoy topics such as the Second World War and 'How things grow' but are not given enough opportunities to practise their literacy, numeracy and communications skills in these subjects. They do extended pieces of writing every fortnight, but this is not often enough for them to hone their literacy skills to a high enough level. New activities such as 'Give me Ten' have improved reading, but other recent changes have not yet had an impact on standards, especially in writing.
- The school has used its primary sports funding to employ specialist coaches to teach lessons and run clubs. This not only gives pupils the opportunity to excel, but also helps teachers develop their own skills as teachers of this subject. Leaders have made sure that all pupils have the opportunity to take part in a sporting activity, either after school or at lunchtime.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is particularly strong. Pupils and their families represent a rich diversity of backgrounds and cultures. Teachers use pupils' own

experiences to develop an understanding of, and strong sense of respect for, other cultures. The school promotes equality of opportunity and appreciates the need to make sure that all pupils achieve equally well.

- Parents are very positive about the school. They appreciate the caring atmosphere and that the headteacher and staff look after the pupils well. They say that their children are very happy in school. Parents of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs particularly appreciate the support they receive.
- The local authority has provided good support for the school. It acted positively when leaders recently requested more rigorous checks on how they were doing, and it has provided a good range of training courses for teachers and governors.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are very supportive of the school. They understand how it needs to improve and are positive about the improvements that have already taken place. Governors have played their part in tackling challenging issues to ensure better teaching and learning, and are very clear about the current quality of teaching. They understand how the new appraisal system has contributed to this and make sure that teachers' pay rises are linked to the progress their pupils make.
- A recent review of the strengths and expertise of different governors has helped them become more focused when visiting the school to check on how well it is doing. They check how well the plans for improvement are being implemented and whether they are making a difference. In meetings, governors ask leaders relevant questions to hold them accountable for improving the school.
- Finances are managed well. Governors know that the pupil premium is to help eligible pupils to achieve well and are aware that this could be better. Governors use school data to check how well eligible pupils are doing but they are not confident that it is quickly closing the gap between their achievement and that of other pupils. Governors understand how the new primary school sports funding is used to extend physical education opportunities.
- Governors have made sure that national requirements for safeguarding and child protection 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	117188
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	440550

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	240
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Diane Page
Headteacher	Jennifer Moles
Date of previous school inspection	3 October 2011
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