

Sowe Valley Primary School

Princethorpe Way, Coventry, CV3 2QX

Inspection dates

27–28 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Although pupils' progress has improved in the last year it is inconsistent, with boys in particular not doing as well as they should, especially in mathematics.
- Attainment in mathematics has remained below average.
- Attainment was well below average in spelling and grammar in 2013.
- Too few more-able pupils reach the higher levels of attainment and realise their full potential.
- Teaching is improving, but it is not yet consistently good. Consequently, pupils do not always achieve as well as they should.
- Teachers' marking of pupils work is not consistently effective. It gives pupils insufficient guidance about how to improve their work. Teachers do not always ensure that pupils fully understand what they are learning or the guidance they are given.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher, supported well by other leaders and the governors, are making increasingly rapid improvements in pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching.
- Pupils are very well cared for and kept safe. They enjoy coming to school, behave well and have good attitudes to their learning.
- Leaders use the pupil premium effectively to help eligible pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Children make a good start to their learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly in their language and social skills.
- The school has good relationships with parents. Staff make every effort to encourage parents to understand what their children are learning about and how they can support them.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 15 lessons. Six of these were seen jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with pupils, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, other staff with particular responsibilities, four governors and a member of the local authority.
- Inspectors discussed teaching and pupils' progress with class teachers. Pupils' books and records of their progress were also examined.
- Inspectors listened to pupils reading and discussed their reading experiences with them.
- The inspectors took account of 22 responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire for parents, and one letter. They talked informally to parents at the start of the school day. The inspectors also examined 48 responses from the parents to the school's own survey of their views. The inspectors also examined 15 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- A range of documentation was examined, including the school's development plan and analysis of its strengths and weaknesses, safeguarding arrangements, school policies, and records of checks made by leaders on the quality of teaching.

Inspection team

Rodney Braithwaite, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Damian Booth	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Three quarters of the pupils are White British, the remainder coming from a range of other ethnic heritages. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below 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 above average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is above average. This is additional government funding provided for pupils who are in the care of the local authority, known to be eligible for free school meals, or have a parent in the armed forces.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school has seven single-age classes, including a Reception class.
- The school provides a well-attended daily breakfast club.
- Since the previous inspection there have been several changes of teaching staff.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, and thereby pupils' attainment and progress, by ensuring that:
 - more-able pupils are given more challenging work in all subjects across the school
 - all teachers use marking to give pupils clear guidance on how they can improve, and check that pupils fully understand what they are learning and how to complete tasks to a high standard
 - teachers have more opportunities to observe outstanding teaching in their own school and others, to inform and improve their own practice.
- Improve achievement in writing and mathematics, particularly that of boys, by:
 - ensuring the accuracy of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar in their writing in all year groups
 - identifying precisely the weakest skills in mathematics, planning learning that is concentrated on these areas and reinforcing it in other subjects as appropriate
 - checking the progress pupils, especially boys, make in mathematics more frequently and taking swift action to address any emerging underachievement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Children enter Reception with skills and experiences below those typically seen for their age, especially in their language, speaking and social development. Pupils' subsequent progress as they move through the school has been too inconsistent, particularly that of boys, in writing and mathematics. Although reading and writing standards are now rising across the school, progress in mathematics has been slower and attainment is still below average.
- Over time, pupils have typically not made good progress in Years 1 and 2. In 2013 at the end of Year 2, standards were below average. Progress has been inconsistent in Years 3 to 6, and until this year, pupils' attainment, especially in mathematics and aspects of grammar and spelling, has been below average by the time they leave. Few of the more-able pupils have reached higher levels of attainment in mathematics. Boys generally perform less well than girls in all subjects.
- The school's records of pupils' progress, observations of teaching and work in pupils' books indicate that progress in reading, writing and mathematics is now rising quickly in Key Stage 1 for all groups including boys, more-able pupils, and pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Progress in the learning of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) has improved and standards are approaching the levels expected.
- Achievement is also improving in reading, writing and mathematics in each year in Key Stage 2. In mathematics, this is the result of more effective teaching led by the deputy headteacher and subject leader. More rigorous but realistic targets for the performance of teachers and pupils are being set and met increasingly often. As in Key Stage 1, these recent improvements for all groups, including pupils who speak English as an additional language, are not yet sustained.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress, particularly in their language and social skills, because teaching is good. More children than in the past are beginning to reach expected levels by the time they go into Year 1.
- The improving picture in achievement is reflected in the better progress now being made by disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. In the past their progress was inconsistent, but the work seen and school data show that the achievement of most of these pupils is rising and for an increasing number, progress is now good.
- Pupils who are supported by the pupil premium make good progress. Although their attainment was behind that of other pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2013, they have caught up quickly this year in both English and mathematics. Teachers understand their needs and, with well-trained and competent teaching assistants, plan carefully focused learning for individuals and small groups of pupils. Consequently, their attainment in 2013 was above that of other pupils in the school in reading, writing and mathematics, including at the higher levels.
- Pupils are keen readers, and the school has made sure that boys especially have books which appeal to them and help them enjoy and improve their reading. Reading records are regularly kept and used effectively by teachers to monitor pupils' reading habits.
- Pupils are starting to achieve well in other subjects such as science and physical education as more opportunities are provided to extend their learning, following the purchase of good quality resources and good use of the additional funding for sport.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching has not been good enough to ensure pupils have consistently reached the levels of learning and knowledge of which they are capable, especially in aspects of writing and mathematics.
- Teachers have not consistently provided work that is sufficiently challenging, particularly in the case of more-able pupils. This has meant that teachers have struggled to increase the rate of pupils' progress, in part because they do not always ensure pupils always fully understand what they are meant to be learning.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly but do not discuss it with them or give them the detail required to bring the marked improvements that are needed quickly enough. This is also the case in the marking of pupils' writing beyond literacy lessons. Teachers do not always ensure that pupils fully understand the guidance they are given on how to improve.
- Teachers are very positive in their desire to improve their own skills through regular training, but have not yet had sufficient opportunities to observe and learn from outstanding teaching, either in their own school, or in others.
- As a result of action taken by leaders, teaching is improving, particularly in reading and writing, where the impact of the improved emphasis on phonics is increasingly evident. However, in mathematics, teaching is still struggling to address a legacy of past underachievement. There are clear signs of increasing progress, although not enough pupils are reaching higher levels at present. They do not yet have enough opportunities to practise and sharpen their weakest mathematical skills in different subjects.
- The school's own observations and evidence from the inspection show that teaching is now increasingly good and hardly any is inadequate. Effective learning was seen when a small group of pupils in Year 6 were being taught how to be accurate in their use of speech marks, by writing an imaginary conversation with David Beckham. In Year 5, pupils used a variety of learning aids, including technology, to work out the relationships between different weights by using fractions and decimals. A teacher's good subject knowledge helped pupils in Year 2 to learn quickly about noun phrases when writing about 'Fantastic Mr Fox'.
- Children in the Reception class make good progress because adults know them well and are skilled in guiding each child in their next steps in learning. They are particularly successful in helping to improve children's speaking and communication skills.
- Teachers work effectively with their teaching assistants. Increasingly, they use data and other checks on pupils' progress in order to adapt learning, often for small groups or on a one-to-one basis. This is helping pupils supported by the pupil premium to make good progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. This is the case in lessons and around the school, and outside on the extensive play areas. They are lively and friendly and try hard to be well-mannered and polite to adults, typically standing back at doorways to let others through, and remembering often to say 'please' and 'thank you'.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and have enthusiastic attitudes to their learning. Responses from parents indicate universal approval of the way school manages behaviour. Staff also report very

little concern about pupils' behaviour, which has improved over time.

- Older pupils especially have a mature attitude to their learning, saying, 'We need to learn a lot so that we can get a job, have a better future and grow up to be somebody.' They talk excitedly about a wide range of activities they have found memorable. These include singing with 'Young Voices' in Birmingham, rock climbing on a residential visit, 'Golden Time' on Fridays and even, 'learning my number bonds to 10'.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils firmly state that they trust the adults in the school who are always there to help them. The school works effectively with external professionals and services in supporting pupils and families whose circumstances make them vulnerable.
- Families readily confirm that the help they have received from staff has benefited their children, in particular the support from the school's learning mentor.
- Most pupils work well together in class, and are sociable in the playground and dinner hall. Occasionally a small number of pupils lose interest in their learning or allow small things to upset them, but other pupils try hard not to be distracted.
- Children in the Reception class quickly learn what is expected of them and take turns and learn to see activities through to their conclusion as soon as they start school. Staff work closely with parents to help children understand social routines.
- There is very little evidence of bullying. Pupils only mention isolated examples of name-calling and say adults deal with disputes fairly. They have a clear understanding of cyber-bullying through the internet; this includes younger pupils down to Year 2 who talked accurately about the possible dangers in using social networking software.
- Attendance fluctuates but is mostly below average. However, as with problems with the punctuality of a few pupils, school leaders have introduced rigorous procedures which have resulted in much improvement in both aspects in this school year.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has shown calm determination in leading the school through important changes in staff, and in guiding school improvement with increasing success in the last year. She has been ably supported by the deputy headteacher, who is a good teaching role-model for staff.
- Improvements introduced by senior leaders since the last inspection include better provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, more good teaching, and better checks on pupils' progress. The school has a strong partnership with parents and does much to help them understand how their children learn at school and how they can support them in their learning at home.
- The school has worked effectively to develop the knowledge and understanding of its middle leaders, such as subject leaders, and is now giving them much greater responsibility for leading their areas. Staff have responded well to the new expectations of them.
- Leadership and management are not yet outstanding because pupils' achievement has not been sustained at a good level over time, and pupils are not yet making as much progress in

mathematics as in reading and writing. Teaching is not yet consistently good or outstanding.

- Leaders' judgements of the quality of teaching and learning are accurate and they give teachers clear guidance on how they can improve their skills. Teachers say they appreciate the support they receive and take every opportunity they can to improve their knowledge and skills. Morale amongst the staff is high and they express their pride and pleasure in working in such a 'big family school'. However, they have too few opportunities to observe outstanding teaching and introduce it into their own practice.
- Leaders use the pupil premium successfully, resulting in eligible pupils making good progress. They also ensure that the new sports funding is used to enhance teachers' skills through the provision of high quality training, so that teachers can improve pupils' skills, their opportunities to take part in organised sports and their general health and well-being.
- Increasingly, the school is broadening the range of learning activities across all subjects. It also promotes strong values in daily life, as was seen in an assembly led by the headteacher. The importance of perseverance, teamwork and respect was understood clearly by the whole school, and some pupils were evidently very proud of the work they had recently accomplished. Such events, together with pupils' good behaviour, contribute to the good promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education across the school.
- The school promotes equal opportunities well, and is a fully welcoming multicultural society. This results in no discrimination as a result of gender, ethnic heritage, disability or special educational need.
- The local authority works closely with the school, and recognises it as a continually improving school with effective leadership.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The experienced Chair of the Governing Body leads a team of very active governors who continually seek to increase their knowledge of the school's performance. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement, and are not afraid of challenging leaders rigorously about the performance of both pupils and teachers.
 - Governors link with school leaders, take part in regular training, and visit school frequently. They have a good knowledge of how to set challenging performance targets for the headteacher, and are involved closely in staff appointments and analysing teachers' performance in relation to the progress of their pupils to inform pay decisions.
 - Governors monitor the spending of the pupil premium very carefully, relating it to the progress of these pupils compared to others in the school. They know how the sports funding is used and its contribution to the improvement of the fitness and health of pupils. Governors make sure that safeguarding arrangements fully meet national requirements, that pupils are kept safe and that school policies are regularly reviewed.

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	103671
Local authority	Coventry
Inspection number	431119

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	204
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Chappell
Headteacher	Carole Carter
Date of previous school inspection	26 March 2012
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