

Mill Mead Primary School

Port Vale, Hertford, SG14 3AA

Inspection dates 1–2 April 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.

- Children in Nursery and Reception get off to a good start and progress well.
- Good progress continues as pupils move through the school and attainment by the end of Year 6 is above average in reading and usually above average in mathematics
- Pupils are taught well and this contributes to their good progress.
- Teachers establish good relationships with pupils. Explanations, instructions and questioning effectively promote learning.
- The school has a positive and welcoming atmosphere.
- Pupils show a keen interest in their learning.
- Behaviour is good in lessons and in other parts of the school.
- There are effective procedures to ensure pupils are safe and secure. Pupils feel safe and very well looked after by staff.
- Attendance is above average.
- There is a good range of additional activities offered, with modern foreign languages and music being strengths.
- The headteacher and other key leaders provide good leadership in promoting good achievement for pupils and developing teaching.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils' attainment and progress in writing are not as good as in reading and mathematics.
- There are inconsistencies in pupils' handwriting and presentation. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to write extended pieces in different subjects.
- There is not enough outstanding teaching and at times, tasks are not demanding enough to extend the most able.
- Some parents do not believe that communication is good enough, particularly information about their children's progress.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 16 lessons. Some of these were seen jointly with the headteacher.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, staff, a representative from the local authority, governors, parents and pupils.
- The inspectors took account of the 106 responses to the online survey (Parent View), the results of the school's own parent survey carried out in summer 2013 and correspondence from parents.
- Questionnaires from 18 members of staff were analysed.
- The inspectors examined school policies, information about pupils' attainment and progress, teachers' plans, pupils' work, safeguarding procedures and the school's development planning.

Inspection team

Derek Watts, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Westall

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- Most of the pupils are White British.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is well below average. The proportion supported through school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is also well below average.
- A below average proportion of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for pupils in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and other groups.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise teaching to outstanding by making sure that:
 - teachers always set demanding tasks which challenge and extend the most able.
- Raise pupils' achievement in writing by:
 - improving pupils' handwriting and presentation so that these are consistently good
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to write extended pieces in different subjects.
- Strengthen the communication with parents by:
 - seeking their views and taking steps to tackle their concerns
 - revising how the school provides information to parents about their children's progress.
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Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children enter the Nursery with the knowledge, understanding and skills typically expected for their age. They make good progress in Nursery and Reception because of good teaching.
- During the past three years, attainment by the end of Year 6 has been above average in reading and usually above average in mathematics. In writing, attainment has been closer to average.
- In 2013, Year 6 attainment and progress dipped, particularly in mathematics. Some staffing changes and weaknesses in provision contributed to this decline. Leaders and staff have taken robust action and underperformance has been arrested. Internal assessments show that pupils are making good progress in mathematics as well as reading. Attainment in the current Year 6 is looking securely above average in these areas.
- Pupils' attainment and progress in writing is not as strong as in reading and mathematics. There are inconsistencies in pupils' handwriting and presentation. Very few pupils in Year 2 are writing with a fluent and joined hand. Handwriting is much better by Year 5 and 6. Positive steps are being taken to improve pupils' punctuation and spelling. However, pupils are not applying their writing skills sufficiently in different subjects to create good quality extended pieces.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because of good teaching and the targeted individual and small-group support they receive.
- The few pupils in last year's Year 6 supported by pupil premium attained higher standards than their classmates. The school's assessments show that those supported by the pupil premium are achieving at least as well as the others. Good support helps ensure that pupils eligible for the funding make good progress.
- In 2013, an above average proportion of Year 6 pupils' attained the higher than expected National Curriculum levels in reading. However, this was not the case in writing and mathematics. In the current Year 6, more pupils are working towards the higher levels, particularly in mathematics. However, in some lessons across the school, the work set is not fully effective in extending the most able.
- Pupils make good progress in applying and developing their speaking and listening skills. Teachers provide plenty of opportunities for them to discuss their learning and to express their ideas and opinions. Many pupils in the school are articulate and confident speakers with a rich vocabulary. For example in Year 5, pupils demonstrated their good knowledge of poetry. They explained very clearly the meanings of terms such as onomatopoeia, acrostic, metaphor and personification.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to reading and they read widely at home and school. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils in Years 1 and 2 benefit from frequent teaching of phonics, letters and the sounds they make. The results of the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2013 were average. Older pupils apply their reading skills well to interrogate pieces of text and to find useful information.
- In mathematics, most pupils are making good progress. Their calculation and mental skills have been sharpened. They use a range of strategies effectively to solve challenging problems. For example, pupils in Year 1, used coins, number lines and number bonds to solve problems

involving money.

- Pupils develop healthy lifestyles and physical fitness through physical education lessons and the additional sporting activities provided.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Good teaching has a positive impact on pupils' progress. Teachers have established good relationships with the pupils and manage them well. Clear demonstrations and explanations help pupils to make good gains in their knowledge and help to deepen their understanding. Questioning is used effectively to check pupils' understanding of new learning.
- In Nursery and Reception, children are provided with interesting indoor and outdoor learning activities. They make good gains in their learning. Children benefit from effective adult instruction and direction in literacy, numeracy and physical skills. They also have good opportunities to explore, investigate and be creative.
- Pupils know and understand what they are expected to learn because teachers clearly share the purpose of the lesson with the class. Interactive whiteboards are used well to illustrate the key learning points.
- In a successful mathematics lesson in Year 6, pupils made rapid progress in solving problems involving area. This was because challenging and interesting tasks were provided. Pupils were motivated, fully engaged and applied their previous knowledge and skills very well to their work. All groups of pupils, including the most able made at least good progress. However, in some lessons, tasks are not sufficiently demanding to extend and stretch the most able. When this happens, pupils make less progress than they should.
- The teaching of calculation in mathematics has been strengthened and pupils are provided with good opportunities to solve problems that are often relevant to their everyday life. There are weaknesses in pupils' handwriting because there is not a consistent approach to the teaching of handwriting skills. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply their writing skills in subjects other than English.
- The teaching of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is effective. Teaching assistants are well deployed and make a good contribution to pupils' learning, particularly for those who need additional help with literacy and numeracy. One-to-one support is used well to improve pupils' essential skills.
- Pupils are set clear targets to guide their learning, particularly in writing and mathematics. They know what they are aiming for. The marking of pupils' work has improved. Teachers provide praise for good work and constructive comments to help move pupils on to the next steps of their learning. Pupils find teachers' oral feedback and marking very helpful.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- Children in Nursery and Reception have settled in to good learning routines. They enjoy the interesting learning indoor and outdoor activities provided. Adults have established very positive relationships with the children. Children relate well to others, they share equipment, take turns and show consideration for the other children.

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils show a keen interest in their learning. They participate with enthusiasm in the activities offered. Pupils' skills in working collaboratively are well developed. Behaviour is good in lessons, assembly, in the dining hall and around the school. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning and the good behaviour contribute well to their good progress. Just occasionally, pupils are less engaged and focused when work is not sufficiently demanding.
- Leaders and staff successfully promote the five Rs of resilience, readiness, reflection, responsibility and resourcefulness well. They also emphasise the sixth R of respect. As a result, pupils are considerate, friendly, positive and respectful members of the school community.
- Pupils show a good understanding of different cultures and faiths. They readily take on positions of responsibility such as being on the school council, being library assistants or acting as playground buddies.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. As a result, pupils feel safe at school and very well looked after by staff. Discussions with pupils reveal that they have a clear understanding of bullying and its different forms, including name-calling and cyber-bullying. Pupils reported to the inspectors that there was no bullying in the school.
- The school's records show that incidents of unacceptable behaviour are uncommon. The clear systems of rewards and sanctions are known and appreciated by the pupils.
- Parents are supportive and pupils enjoy coming to school. Attendance levels are consistently above average.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and key subject leaders provide good leadership in raising pupils' achievement and developing teaching.
- The headteacher with the staff has created a positive, safe and welcoming school environment where pupils can learn and develop well.
- Through systematic checking of performance, leaders and governors have a clear overview of the school's strengths and areas for development. The findings from the school's evaluation of its own performance are used well to bring about necessary improvement. For example, decisive and robust action has been taken to raise achievement in mathematics, after a brief period of decline. Subject leaders are fully engaged in checking performance and developing their areas of responsibility.
- The quality of teaching is regularly checked by the headteacher and local authority. There is a clear system for the appraisal of staff performance. Targets to improve teachers' practice and skills are clearly linked to 'Teaching Standards', the school's improvement priorities and to pupils' progress. Appropriate support and training are provided to help teachers meet their targets.
- The local authority has a clear overview of the school's performance. A Hertfordshire Improvement Partner (HIP) provides good support and challenge to the school. The local authority advisory service for mathematics has made a good contribution to improvements in this subject.

- The school provides an interesting range of learning activities to promote good achievement and good personal development for pupils. Improvements to provision in mathematics are having a positive impact on pupils' achievement. Music is a strength with a school choir, orchestra and over 40 pupils receiving music tuition. Pupils also thoroughly enjoy learning French and German. The recent primary sports funding is being used well to extend pupils' sporting activities. There are no signs of discrimination in the school and all pupils have access to the full range of activities provided. Pupil premium funding has been effectively used to raise achievement of eligible pupils.
- There was a very good response to the inspection from parents. The results of online survey, Parent View, comments from parents and the school's own survey reveal that a significant number of parents believe that the communication between home and school could be improved. In particular, parents do not believe that they receive sufficient information about their children's progress. Senior leaders are keen to tackle this issue and find ways of meeting parents' needs.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body are enthusiastic and supportive of the school. They show a clear understanding of pupils' attainment and progress. Governors are kept well informed about the quality of teaching and learning. The governors' clear overview of the school's performance enables them to provide challenge and hold the school to account. For example, the governors have been particularly challenging and questioning about the school's dip in Year 6 attainment in mathematics in 2013. Governors are up to date on performance management procedures and ensure that promotion and pay awards are based on responsibilities and pupils' progress. They make sure that the pupil premium funding is used correctly and check the impact of the funding on pupils' progress. The governors have attended useful courses to help improve their effectiveness. All safeguarding requirements 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	117297
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	439629

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	242
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Simon Newland
Headteacher	Sue Nesbitt-Larking
Date of previous school inspection	July 2009
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