

Ashtree Primary School and Nursery

Chertsey Rise, Stevenage, SG2 9JQ

Inspection dates

14–15 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2	2
Leadership and management	Good	2	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils' achievement is good and standards are rising. At the end of Year 6 in 2013, they were above average in mathematics.
- Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Activities are well organised and stimulating. Children make good progress in developing their early reading and writing skills.
- Teachers have very good relationships with pupils and make learning interesting. This helps them to concentrate and learn well. Pupils know what they need to do to improve their work.
- Pupils behave well, enjoy learning and say they feel very safe at school. The school is a happy and welcoming community.
- Effective care, particularly of those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, prepares pupils well for learning.
- The headteacher, with the full support of staff and governors, has made effective changes to ensure that teaching and pupils' achievement continue to improve.
- Parents are very happy with their children's education and say that they are kept well informed of their progress.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Standards are not yet as high in English as in mathematics because of weaknesses in writing.
- Pupils are not always given hard enough work in writing, or opportunities to practise and use their extended writing skills in different subjects.
- Leaders are not making the best use of data to check the impact of strategies for improvement.
- Subject leaders are not fully involved in checking and developing the quality of teaching and pupils' learning.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 21 lessons, some of which were seen jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors observed pupils in lessons, at play, at lunch and as they moved around school.
- Inspectors held meetings with two groups of pupils, listened to pupils read and checked reading progress records.
- Discussions were held with staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors. The lead inspector held a telephone call with a representative from the local authority.
- A wide range of documentation was reviewed, including records of the quality of teaching and of pupils' attainment and progress, the school's view of its performance and the school development plan. In addition, records of the governing body meetings, safeguarding documentation and reports from the school improvement adviser were reviewed.
- During the inspection the inspectors took account of the 42 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), and 33 responses to the staff questionnaire. Inspectors also spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day.

Inspection team

Susan Thomas-Pounce, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Janet Tomkins	Additional Inspector
Simon Hughes	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Ashtree Primary School is larger than most primary schools.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is average. This additional funding is for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement in writing, especially for the most able pupils, by:
 - making sure that teachers show consistently high expectations for what the most able pupils can achieve in writing
 - giving pupils more opportunities to write at length in English, and to apply and improve their writing skills across a wide range of other subjects.
- Strengthen leadership and management at all levels to secure more rapid improvements by:
 - making better use of data to check how well improvement strategies are working
 - fully involving all subject leaders in checking the quality of teaching and pupils' learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- The majority of children start school with skills and understanding that are below those expected for their age, particularly in communication, language, literacy and personal development. By the time pupils leave school at the end of Year 6, standards are broadly average overall. In 2013 they were above average in mathematics. This represents good overall achievement for all groups of pupils.
- Children in both the Nursery and Reception make good progress as a result of high levels of care and support, stimulating classrooms and outdoor areas, and activities which encourage them to enjoy learning. By the end of Key Stage 1, standards are average overall, being strongest in reading and mathematics.
- Reading skills are taught very well using phonics (learning letters and the sounds they make) and pupils use these acquired skills successfully in their initial efforts in reading. As a result, pupils achieved very well in the Year 1 screening check in phonics in both 2012 and 2013. Pupils read often and widely and express an enjoyment in reading.
- Progress across Key Stage 2 is particularly strong in mathematics. Mathematics is taught effectively and consistently across the school. Work is presented well and shows that pupils apply their skills successfully to solve problems and explain different methods of calculations.
- In 2013, the most able pupils did particularly well in mathematics and the grammar, spelling and punctuation test, but the percentage reaching the higher National Curriculum Level 5 in writing was below average. Across the school, pupils' writing is not as well developed as their reading. Expectations of pupils' writing in different subjects are not always high enough and it is not always clear to pupils exactly what they are expected to achieve in lessons.
- The school's assessment and tracking data show that pupils supported by the pupil premium make similar progress to their classmates across the age range. The standards they reached in Year 6 in 2013 were similar to the same group of pupils nationally, but more than a year behind others in the school in mathematics and two terms behind in English. Better use of the pupil premium to provide extra support where needed is narrowing the gaps further this year.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, often with very low starting points, have their needs identified well. Teachers and teaching assistants adapt learning activities in line with their abilities and provide effective help and guidance. This extra help improves their rates of progress. Pupils benefit from good pastoral care and are fully included and supported in all activities. This reflects the school's commitment to equal opportunities for all pupils.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Typically good teaching helps pupils learn and achieve well during their time at school. Relationships are very positive and pupils are eager to do well.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children enjoy learning and exploring the wide range of resources and well-thought-out classroom and outdoor learning areas. Children are proud of the many achievements that are recorded in their learning journey journals, which they can freely and regularly read with their parents and each other.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. This was seen in a Year 2 art and design lesson where pupils were creating clay masks of 'Mr Twit'. The teacher rapidly developed pupils' understanding of the importance of ensuring the correct consistency of their clay and their knowledge of techniques and correct tools to manipulate and decorate. Pupils had looked at sculptures by Ivan Lovatt, which inspired them to create high-quality work. All groups of pupils enthusiastically explained their designs while considering how improvements could be made.
- Teachers use a range of techniques well to probe pupils' ideas and get them to think more deeply about their explanations. This was observed in a Year 6 lesson where the teacher asked a variety of effective questions to successfully get pupils to fully explain their understanding of the properties of quadrilateral angles. The teacher kept a close check on pupils' work and understanding and was quick to help when pupils did not understand.
- Teachers make good use of information and communication technology. For example, pupils' work when placed under a 'visualizer' receives immediate feedback from other pupils during review in lessons. This improves pupils' analytical skills and helps them to better identify specific areas for development in their own work. The effectiveness of teachers' feedback to pupils and marking have improved since the previous inspection.
- The skills of teaching assistants are good. They are used well to support individuals and small groups to ensure that pupils make good progress.
- Teachers assess pupils' attainment and progress carefully and accurately. However, this information is not always used effectively to match work to pupils' ability levels to ensure they make good progress. This is especially the case in writing. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to write at length and in different subjects. There is a lack of challenge, especially for the most able pupils, because expectations and targets set for pupils in writing are not high enough.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are friendly, polite and courteous. They say that they look forward to coming to school, that they like learning and playing with their friends. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good.
- Children's behaviour in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. They play and work well together. They are good at sharing the different toys and resources with each other.
- Parents think behaviour is good. This is supported by the school's behaviour records, which show that on the few occasions when incidents have occurred, they have been well managed by the staff concerned.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Staff, parents and pupils agree. Pupils say that they feel very safe in school. Pupils are friendly to each other at all times of the school day. They show respect for others when playing outside during break and lunchtimes.
- Pupils told inspectors that they know when they need to tell teachers about problems, and that teachers are good at dealing with their issues. They have a good understanding of the different types of bullying, such as racism or homophobia, and say that bullying of any kind rarely happens.

- Attendance is rising and is now broadly average.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, staff and governors are ambitious for the school. All staff who completed the questionnaire confirmed that they knew what the school was trying to achieve.
- Leaders frequently check the quality of teaching, planning and marking. Senior leaders act as good role models for the staff through their own teaching and effectively use their skills to improve the work of others. However, not all subject leaders are fully involved in checking that pupils are achieving as well as they can.
- Leaders have set more challenging targets for teachers in order to drive up standards, including a focus on ensuring that the most able pupils are provided with harder work so that all pupils make better progress in writing. Senior leaders and governors have kept a close eye on the impact the pupil premium grant is having on closing the attainment gap between eligible pupils and others in each class. The impact of this can already be seen in the improved progress of pupils eligible for free school meals.
- The school's plans for improvement concentrate on the right areas. They are based on an honest and accurate view of strengths and weaknesses, but do not always take enough account of the analysis of the information collected and the ways in which this information is then used. Although the plans specify exactly what action is to be taken, they do not always focus sharply enough on the impact they will have on pupils' attainment. However, senior leaders have an accurate view of what is working well and the school's capacity for further improvement is good.
- The curriculum meets the academic and personal needs of pupils well. The school is aware that additional opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills in subjects other than English would further improve their achievement. The numerous opportunities for pupils to work together, broaden their understanding with visitors to the school and go on trips and visits, promote their learning and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well.
- Additional funding to develop pupils' abilities and encourage greater participation in physical education (PE) has had a good impact, improving the health and well-being of pupils. Specialist sports coaches provide additional teaching and new after-school sports clubs for pupils.
- The local authority knows the school well and provides good and consistent support to leaders. Detailed reports provide them with helpful areas for consideration.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors are very experienced and committed to helping the school improve. They have a good understanding of pupils' performance in relation to other schools nationally. They show their commitment by attending staff training days and by undertaking regular visits to classes. They ask probing questions and challenge leaders over school improvement, although occasionally they are held back, because the link between actions and impact is not sharp enough. The governors ensure that financial resources are well managed, and know how the sports and pupil premium funding is spent and what difference they are making to pupils. Governors undertake the performance management of the headteacher effectively. Governors are very clear about the quality of teaching, and the link between staff performance and pay. Their regular monitoring activities ensure that all statutory requirements are met, including those for safeguarding.

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	117352
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	444201

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	464
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	William Spicer
Headteacher	Elizabeth Kirwan
Date of previous school inspection	16 March 2010
Telephone number	01438 351090
Fax number	01438 353464
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