

Comberbach Primary School

Mather Drive, Comberbach, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 6BG

Inspection dates 13–14 May 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		Requires improvement	3
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

- Pupils do not achieve well enough in Years 1 to 6, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- While test results at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 have generally been above average, standards in mathematics at the end of Year 6 have not been high enough. At the end of Year 2, standards in writing and mathematics have also been lower than they should be.
- All groups of pupils, and particularly the most able, are not achieving well enough.
- Teaching is too variable and is not yet good.
- Information about pupils' progress is not being used well enough to plan tasks that improve pupils' achievement quickly.
- Literacy and numeracy skills are not reinforced enough in different subjects across the school.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour in lessons are not consistently good.
- A minority of parents are unsure of how well the school deals with bullying or if it is taking place.
- Middle leaders are not fully involved with driving improvements throughout the school.
- Checks on teaching do not focus enough on the difference it is making to pupils' achievements in different subjects.
- Pupils lack knowledge and experience of cultural diversity in Britain.
- Governors have not held leaders to account enough for weaknesses in teaching and achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher provides strong leadership. Action of senior leaders are having a positive impact on improving the school.
- Achievement in reading is good across the school.
- Achievement and teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage are good.
- Leaders have recently improved accuracy in checking how well pupils are achieving in writing.
- Due to recent improvements by leaders in the teaching of reading and mathematics, pupils now look set to reach higher levels in reading and mathematics by the end of Years 2 and 6.
- Pupils feel safe and happy at the school. Their attendance and punctuality has improved over time.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited a range of lessons across all classes. The headteacher joined three of the visits.
- Pupils' books were closely checked by inspectors.
- Inspectors took account of 92 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View). They also looked at responses to a parental questionnaire recently carried out by the school and talked to parents on the school grounds.
- Meetings were held with two groups of pupils and inspectors spoke to pupils at breaks and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors also held discussions with governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and school staff.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own data on pupils' current progress, documents relating to the school's plans for improvement, its procedures for checking the quality of teaching, records relating to behaviour and attendance and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Clarice Nelson-Rowe, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Clare Henderson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- Only a very small number of pupils are supported by the pupil premium. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.
- The headteacher was appointed in September 2013 and there has been some staffing instability since the previous inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that it is consistently good or better, in order that pupils in Years 1 to 6 make good progress, particularly in mathematics and in writing, by ensuring that:
 - work is adapted more quickly, particularly for the most able, to help them consistently reach higher levels
 - more effective use is made of information about pupils' progress to ensure that work always builds on, and extends, what pupils already know and can do
 - pupils are given clear guidance about how well they are doing and how to improve their work
 - pupils have more opportunities to solve problems, practise mathematical skills in different subjects, and to explain and draw conclusions
 - more frequent checks on the progress of pupils as they learn lead to more timely help to correct any errors in their knowledge and understanding, including in their spelling and punctuation
 - pupils develop their writing skills further in different subjects
 - there is further development of imaginative writing through more opportunities for extended writing.
- Improve behaviour by ensuring that:
 - pupils are consistently inspired and encouraged in lessons, so that their attitudes to learning and behaviour are always good
 - records are kept about behaviour to assess where it needs to be further improved and whether bullying is taking place in the school
 - parents are more informed about bullying and how the school would deal with it, should it occur.
- Increase the impact of leadership at all levels, including governance, by ensuring that:
 - middle leaders are involved more fully in checking and developing teaching, particularly in writing and mathematics
 - checks on the quality of teaching look closely at the progress in skills of different groups of pupils, particularly the most able
 - pupils' spiritual and cultural development is promoted through a range of subjects and experiences, particularly with relation to raising their awareness of cultural diversity in modern

Britain

- closer checks are made by governors and leaders on whether the school is successfully addressing identified areas for improvement.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement. Pupils do not consistently make good progress from Years 1 to 6. This is particularly the case in writing and mathematics.
- Pupils start Year 1 with levels of skills which are at least typical for their age and increasingly above. While overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 is above average, not enough pupils reach the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2.
- Since the previous inspection, test results in English and mathematics have been mostly above average by the end of Year 6. However, in 2013, while writing remained above average, reading and mathematics fell to broadly average. This does not represent good progress from pupils' individual starting points.
- The proportion of pupils who make expected progress in reading and mathematics by the end of Year 6 has been close to national figures. However, not enough have been making more than expected progress, and particularly so in mathematics.
- The most able pupils do not make consistently good progress from Years 1 to 6. This is particularly the case in mathematics. Tasks are not fully challenging them to ensure that they make as much progress as possible.
- Achievement in writing has been previously much better than in reading and mathematics by the end of Year 6, and above national figures. However, due to the drive of the new headteacher, the school now has a more accurate picture of the levels of writing across the school. As a result, school records and the close checking of books by inspectors show that writing is not as strong as it once appeared. Pupils do not always write imaginatively and their spelling and punctuation are not always accurate.
- Although it is now starting to improve, not enough pupils are making good progress in mathematics. Pupils do not always have the skills required to explain their methods or draw conclusions from mathematical information, such as about graphs or charts. Their mathematical skills are not developed enough across different subjects and only recently have they increased their skills to solve everyday problems.
- Across the school, achievement in reading is good. Although the school's results dipped in the national Year 1 screening in phonics (letters and their sounds) last year, current pupils in Years 1 and 2 demonstrate good phonic skills because the teaching of reading is now regular and well structured across the school. In all year groups, pupils show strong enjoyment of reading and good understanding of story lines and characters. They also show good skills in summarising information correctly from researching information using books and technology. Strong links between home and school are helping to enhance enjoyment of reading.
- The majority of pupils start with skills and abilities that are least typical for their age. They make good progress during their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage because of the good quality of teaching. By the end of the Reception Year, they are well prepared for learning in Year 1.
- School records and work in books show that achievement is starting to improve. The new mathematics programme put in place, and the greater drive to raise standards in reading, is paying off. For example, the school's records show that standards by the end of Years 2 and 6 are now set to rise at the higher levels in mathematics and reading, but this is not the case for writing.
- Only a very small number of pupils in Year 6 in 2013 were supported by the pupil premium, including those known to be eligible for free school meals. Given the small number of pupils, it is not viable to make a judgement about their attainment compared to that of their peers, but their progress is similar to that of others in school.
- The numbers of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are also low in the school. Although good support by teaching assistants was observed during the inspection, their progress also requires improvement.
- A small minority of parents who responded to Parent View, and who spoke to and sent letters to the inspection team, have expressed concerns about the achievement of their children.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it is variable across years and subjects. As a result, pupils' achievement is not consistently good across the school.
- Pupils are not always interested in their work. Their progress slows when they are not inspired or encouraged enough by teachers.
- Work is not always sufficiently challenging because information about pupils' progress is not used well enough to plan activities. Consequently, work provided for pupils does not always build on and extend what pupils already know and can do. This leads to gaps in pupils' learning, particularly in writing and mathematics, and for the most able.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly and points for improvement are given on different pieces of work. However, it is not always made clear to pupils what steps they need to take to reach a higher level.
- The checking on the progress of pupils is variable. Sometimes, as pupils work, adjustments are not made quickly enough when they find work too easy. As a result, errors in their knowledge and understanding may go unchecked for some time.
- The teaching of writing requires improvement. The skills of spelling and punctuation are not taught effectively and errors in work remain. Pupils have not been given enough opportunities to write at length and it is only recently that pupils have started to use imaginative and varied language in their writing. Pupils are still not given enough opportunities to reinforce their skills across different subjects.
- The quality of questioning has not encouraged pupils to reflect enough on their own beliefs, or about the reasons behind the beliefs or experiences of others. As a result, opportunities to develop their spiritual and cultural awareness have been missed.
- The teaching of reading is good. Pupils say that they enjoy the recent introduction of regular group reading sessions which have accelerated pupils' progress in reading. Pupils show good understanding of different texts in their work and discussions with each other. For example, pupils in Year 5 were observed working well in groups making credible predictions about story endings, based on their good knowledge of characters in a story.
- Improving the teaching of phonics became a focus for the school because the results from last year's screening check in Year 1 were lower than average. Measures put into place to address this, in Years 1 and 2, have met with success. Teaching is now more effective and records show that a greater number are achieving expected levels this year.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, good teaching ensures that children are attentive and enjoy their learning. The outdoor area provides children with many opportunities to develop their learning through play. Children's skills, such as their investigative and problem-solving skills, are developed well. For example, children were observed using gingerbread men to create their own subtractions and could explain their calculations.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. In some lessons, some pupils' attitudes to learning are not consistently good. Some pupils do not always pay attention; they chatter, talk over teachers and distract others.
- Some pupils stated that sometimes there were disruptions to their learning. However, leaders are just starting to record these incidents so, currently, records do not show emerging patterns over time.
- Pupils behave well out of lessons and are very considerate of each other, including in the playground and at lunchtime, demonstrating their good moral code. They have a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong and are respectful of each other and adults.

- Pupils' work in the school garden, for which they have received an award, shows pride in their environment.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel safe and enjoy coming to school. Their attendance has now improved again and is above the national average. Punctuality has also dramatically improved in the last term.
- Pupils appreciate the safety cameras around the school which help them feel secure. They also show good awareness of personal safety issues including safety around using technology. Most parents who completed Parent View, or spoke to inspectors, confirmed that children felt safe and happy at the school.
- Pupils say that bullying did happen occasionally but was always dealt with well by adults. Pupils report that they know where to turn for help if they need it. However, a minority of parents who responded to Parent View and spoke to inspectors do not know if bullying is taking place and whether the school is dealing with it effectively.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because pupils' achievement, teaching and behaviour are not good. Some disturbances to staffing in the past have contributed to this.
- Leaders' commitment to promoting equality and tackling discrimination is not fully effective. This is because different groups of pupils are not achieving well enough, particularly the most able pupils. Some aspects of spiritual and cultural development of pupils are not promoted enough. For example, a lack of involvement with different cultures leads to pupils having a limited awareness about different cultures in Britain today.
- Nevertheless, over a short period and working successfully with other leaders and the governing body, the headteacher has identified clear priorities and produced a very accurate and honest evaluation of what is working well and what needs to be improved.
- The new headteacher is now taking action to improve the school. Working with other middle and senior leaders, sensible actions plans have been designed to bring about change. However, some recent initiatives have not yet had time to have full impact across the school.
- The recent improvements in attendance, assessment, the teaching of reading, and more pupils being on track to achieve higher levels at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 in reading and mathematics, reflect the school's ability to improve further.
- Some middle leaders are new to post and are not yet fully effective in their roles. Their role in checking and developing teaching is not fully embedded. The headteacher is working closely with them in developing confidence in their own leadership skills to make the school more successful. As a result, improvements are being made to reading and mathematics across the school.
- Checks on the quality of teaching have sometimes looked too closely at pupils' tasks rather than the impact of teaching on helping all groups of children to achieve well in different subjects. As a result, school leaders have not always been careful to identify where the gaps are in pupils' skills and how the needs of all groups, particularly of the most able, can be met more effectively.
- Objectives set for teachers to improve their performance provide clear and measurable targets linked to improving pupils' progress. Systems are in place to link performance to salary rewards. Teachers say that their teaching is improving as a result of the training provided by leaders. Parents also felt that the school is improving and expressed confidence in the school leadership.
- Pupils appreciate trips, including residential visits, to develop their knowledge about what they learn in lessons as well as to give them experiences to develop their social and physical skills.
- Pupils benefit greatly from the work of recently trained staff in the school to develop their health and fitness. The primary school sport funding has helped the school to further expand its already active sports programme, including a link with a local high school, to ensure high participation in sports in and outside school.
- The local authority provides light touch support for this school as it was judged good in its previous inspection.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance requires improvement because it has not been strong enough in the past. Governors were not aware enough of pupils' progress and were not, therefore, holding the school to account. This is improving, with some governors now having a better understanding of information about pupils' achievement, and of the systems to manage teachers' performance and links to pay. Although numbers are small, they are aware that the progress of pupils supported by the pupil premium requires improvement, in the same way that the progress of other groups of pupils in the school also requires improvement. They ensure that safeguarding requirements are being met.
- Governors are now beginning to ask more searching questions about the school's work. They ensure that their reviews include regular visits to the school to check directly on key areas of the school's work, such as achievement, the quality of teaching, and leadership and management. However, these reviews have lacked sufficient detail. In addition, governors have not checked whether issues identified by the school's previous inspection have been addressed.

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	111152
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	444241

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	181
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Matthew Lord
Headteacher	Rob Cooper
Date of previous school inspection	15 June 2011
Telephone number	01606 891336
Email address	admin@comberbach.cheshire.sch.uk

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