

Firs Primary School

Dreghorn Road, Castle Bromwich, Birmingham, B36 8LL

Inspection dates 20–21 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		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

- Pupils' achievement over time had been very uneven till this year. The progress of some pupils had been slower than it should have been, especially in writing.
- Although much improved, there are still variations in pupils' progress. This is a particular issue in writing, and for the most-able pupils.
- Occasionally, activities are too easy or difficult for some pupils, which slows their progress.
- Teachers do not always show or explain to pupils clearly enough what is wanted in particular tasks, so they are then slow to start work.
- Teachers do not always make sure that pupils make improvements to their work in response to marking.
- Pupils are not given enough opportunities to write at length, especially in subjects other than English.
- Too few teaching assistants have had the right training to help them to extend pupils' thinking and challenge them to improve. This is a particular issue when they help disabled pupils or those with special educational needs.
- Because of disruption to staffing, there are gaps in leadership in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in some subjects. Although new leaders are being appointed, they have not had time yet to support their colleagues.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders, with increasingly effective support from governors, have successfully focused on helping colleagues to improve teaching, and so raise achievement rapidly this year in English and mathematics.
- Pupils are making better progress throughout the school, and are making up a lot of the ground lost in the past.
- Teaching has improved steadily this year, and most teaching in the school is now good. Pupils greatly enjoy school, behave well and are keen to learn. Pupils from different backgrounds get on well together and make similar progress.
- Pupils feel safe in school and have confidence that the adults will look after them.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 21 lessons, five of these jointly with the headteacher or the deputy headteacher.
- The team spoke to members of staff, representatives of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, and a local leader in education who has been working with the school. Discussions were held with several groups of pupils and many more pupils were spoken to informally. Pupils in Year 1 and Year 6 were heard to read. Samples of pupils work were analysed.
- There were not enough replies to Ofsted’s online parental survey (Parent View) for these to register. The inspectors took note of 77 replies to a survey of parental views conducted by the school this February (using the Parent View questions), and an inspector spoke informally to several parents at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors observed pupils at lunchtime, break-times, around the school and in assemblies.
- A range of documentation was studied, including the school’s self-evaluation and plans to improve, an external review of the school’s effectiveness from October 2014, and information about pupils’ progress and attainment, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Steven Hill, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Susan Hickerton	Additional Inspector
Lynda Townsend	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average primary school.
- Pupils come from a range of ethnic origins, with those of Pakistani, White British and Black African heritages being the largest groups.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is high, but relatively few pupils are at the early stages of learning English.
- The proportion of the school's pupils who are entitled to support from the pupil premium is high. The pupil premium is extra government funding to help the education of pupils who are known to be entitled to free school meals, or who are in the care of the local authority.
- The school meets government floor targets, which are minimum expectations set for pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs who are supported through school action is slightly below average. The proportion of such pupils supported at school action plus, or who have statements of special educational needs is also slightly below average.
- There has been major disruption to staffing, including the senior leadership, over the last two years. The substantive headteacher has not been in school since spring 2013, and for several months there was no headteacher in place. Since June 2013, an interim headteacher has led the school, on secondment from another primary school in the local authority. In the past year, a large proportion of teachers have left the school, including the previous deputy headteacher, and a similar number of others have started.
- There is a day nursery on the school's site which is run by the local authority. This is managed, inspected and reported upon separately. The school runs a daily breakfast club for its own pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the consistency of teaching, so that achievement improves, particularly by:
 - always making sure that the tasks given to pupils are neither too easy nor too hard, especially by ensuring that the most-able pupils are challenged by their work throughout the lesson
 - checking that pupils always know what is wanted in particular tasks, by showing them more clearly, and demonstrating by example when appropriate
 - improving the consistency of marking so that all pupils have a clear understanding of how to develop their work and have time to act on the advice given
 - providing training to teaching assistants, so that they are better able to support learning, and especially to help disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs.
- Improve the quality of pupils' writing, in particular by:
 - giving pupils in all the classes good opportunities to write at length, particularly in subjects other than English, and marking the resultant work as thoroughly as the writing in their English books.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - consolidating the appointment of leaders to support colleagues in their work in all the different

subjects, and in the Early Years Foundation Stage

- providing opportunities for these leaders to check up on provision in their areas of responsibility, and to help their colleagues to raise standards.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Pupils' progress has been too uneven over time for them to achieve as well as they should. Attainment at the end of the school is below average, and is particularly weak in writing. More able pupils do not do as well as they should. Few pupils in Year 6 gain the higher Levels of 5 and 6 in national assessments, especially in writing.
- This year and last, although an average proportion of pupils in Year 6 made the progress expected over the course of Key Stage 2, too few exceeded this. Compared to national figures, results have been particularly weak in writing.
- The school's data and work in pupils' books show that their progress has improved this year throughout the school, particularly since December. Almost all year groups made good progress during the spring term, with Year 6 doing exceptionally well. However, this was not enough to completely overcome previous shortfalls in their achievement.
- The current Year 6 started in Year 3 with attainment that was about two and a half terms behind that of pupils nationally. During Key Stage 2, the gap in reading narrowed to about six months, but the shortfall in writing has increased to a year.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs have made the same erratic but improving progress overall as their classmates. Some of those who are supported at school action sometimes make less progress than they should. The school has made good use of data to target extra help on these pupils, but not enough of the support staff have had sufficient training to give these pupils the specific help that they need.
- Children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and understanding that are below those typical for their age. As in the rest of the school, progress has been erratic at times, and recent improvements to provision, which is generally now good, have not fully ironed out previous inconsistency in children's learning.
- Recent results of checks on pupils' attainment in phonics (how the sounds in words are represented by different letter combinations) have been a little below average. Pupils are making good progress in their phonics skills from low starting points.
- Progress at Key Stage 1 has been steadily improving, as have standards at the end of Year 2. Pupils in the current Year 2 are on track to reach average standard by the end of the year.
- Pupils who are entitled to support from the pupil premium make the same progress as their classmates. It is not possible to make a full comparison between their attainment at the end of the school and that of others because, in 2013, relevant figures for this school were not published for reading and mathematics. In writing, their attainment was a term behind that of their classmates, a lower gap than that found nationally.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make progress that is at least as good as other pupils in the school. Pupils from different ethnic heritages generally make similar progress to each other, although there is a slight tendency for some White British pupils to lag behind their classmates.
- Pupils are doing well in sports and physical education, and participate in a good range of activities, partly through the extra help that has been given by the government's extra funding.

They are enthusiastic and participate energetically, as was observed in lively games based on the sport of kabaddi, during a lesson in Year 4.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Despite increasing strengths, teaching has not been good enough over time to result in good achievement. Much teaching is now good but some still requires improvement. This is shown in pupils' books as well as in the observations during the inspection, the school's data and the school's own evaluations of teaching. Aspects of teaching that are often strengths, are weaknesses at other times.
- Teachers routinely prepare different work for pupils of different abilities. While this is often successful, usually resulting in good progress, sometimes some pupils are given work that is too hard for them. A more common problem is when the tasks for more-able pupils are not challenging enough, so they do not make progress as rapidly as they could.
- Teachers often explain things to pupils in a lively fashion that engages their interest. Some of the best learning happens when teachers make sure that all pupils know just what to do. At other times, when this practice is weaker, some pupils are unclear and are slow to start learning until adults identify their confusion and can help them.
- Teachers mark pupils' written work regularly and often clearly explain to them what they have done well and how they can get better. There is some very good practice, especially in Years 5 and 6, where pupils are asked questions to develop their thinking, given extra tasks to do, which give them more practise, or challenged to tackle something harder. Not all teachers ensure that pupils always respond to their comments and get the full benefit in extending their understanding. Marking is often weaker in subjects other than writing and mathematics.
- Teachers do not always get the full benefit from the hard-working teaching assistants. They are deployed suitably to support different groups, and are consistently effective in ensuring pupils stay on task, concentrate and behave well. Some are good at challenging pupils to extend their thinking, and give a good mixture of challenge and support to disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. However, not all have had enough training to do this uniformly effectively.
- Lessons are orderly, routines well-established and relationships good. Pupils like their teachers and are keen to please them by working hard and behaving well. They enjoy the interesting work they are given, and take a pride in doing well. Teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to work together or to discuss their work, and pupils have good collaborative skills as a result.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They follow instructions well, obey the school's rules and are fully aware of the sanctions and rewards available, which they see as fair. They themselves agree that behaviour in the school is 'usually good' and that teachers quickly sort out any transgressions.
- Pupils are enthusiastic learners, even when teaching requires improvement. They take great pride in their work, and a group of Year 6 pupils all agreed that lessons are 'fun'. The improved curriculum and teacher's lively and enthusiastic presentations ensure that they are engaged and interested in lessons. This shows improvement from behaviour that was identified during the

external review a year ago. This has been a major factor in the improved progress over the current year.

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Major improvements have been made this year. Pupils say they feel safe in school and that they can rely on the adults to help them if there are problems.
- Pupils have learned many aspects of how to keep safe, such as fire safety, and most pupils show a sound understanding of safety when using the internet.
- Pupils have very good relationships with each other and with staff. Boys and girls from different backgrounds play and work together cheerfully. They are tolerant of others, and lively games in the playground, or competitive sports in physical education lessons, are characterised by lack of squabbling or disagreements, with pupils negotiating to reach agreements amicably.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying and know the difference between this and other forms of misbehaviour. They say bullying is rare in school and are confident that teachers will deal with any issues that arise.
- Pupils are friendly, polite and cheerful. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in their attendance, which had been low for some years, but has gone up this year to be in line with the national average. Good behaviour and enjoyment are on display in the popular breakfast club each day with a healthy breakfast combining with a variety of interesting activities to give pupils a good start to the day. The club has also contributed to improved attendance.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Major turbulence in staffing and leadership has disrupted the quality of teaching and the consequent progress of pupils over the last two years.
- The many changes of staffing and the absence of others have meant that some leadership posts remain unfilled, for Early Years Foundation Stage, and for some subjects. The school is taking action to ensure that appointments are made to rectify this. For example, several staff new to the school are taking on these responsibilities to provide a coherent team to help their colleagues. However, there has not been time for them to make much impact. The justified decision to focus on improving English and mathematics in the last year, while successful, has meant that those leaders of other subjects who were in place have not have much chance to work at any depth with their colleagues.
- The management of provision for special educational needs requires improvement. The coordinator is knowledgeable and works hard, but has too many other responsibilities to cope with entirely successfully. There are a number of teaching assistants who are well-trained to provide high-quality interventions to pupils in need, but others lack sufficient training to be as consistently effective.
- Following the absence of the substantive headteacher, a variety of weaknesses were identified in the consistency of teaching, and in assessment procedures. Many pupils were found to be making inadequate progress.
- The interim headteacher has given a clear sense of direction to developments, with an unrelenting focus on improving pupils' progress by insisting that teachers improve their practice. With good support from her deputy headteacher, she has tackled the schools' key weaknesses

with determination and success. Senior staff and governors have not been afraid to take the difficult decisions needed to improve teaching. Measures are now in place, which have improved the quality of teaching, and so are accelerating pupils' progress.

- A key to success has been the introduction of a new and improved system to assess and keep track of pupils' progress. Staff have used this increasingly well to plan work at the right level for pupils, to identify any issues in their performance, and to take action to help individuals and groups to do better.
- Systems to manage teachers' performance have been used effectively to help teachers to improve their practice, relating performance targets to the school's priorities, and to pupils' progress, as well as to teachers' individual professional needs. Systems make suitable links between successful performance and financial remuneration.
- The school has spent the pupil premium funding effectively. There has been a focus on eligible pupils' academic achievement, with increasingly sophisticated targeting of help on particular needs. In parallel, there has been money spent on pupils' pastoral needs, such as attendance or counselling, which ultimately have a positive effect on pupils' progress as well as their full involvement in school life. The impact of the spending can be seen in the lack of any significant difference between the progress of eligible pupils and that of their classmates.
- The extra funding from the government to promote sports and physical education has been used successfully. Spending has been in a variety of areas, but has focused on a health mentor, who leads different sporting and physical activities, in lessons and beyond. This is successfully broadening pupils' opportunities, increasing their participation in different sports and improving their physical well-being. It also provides training to existing staff to help them teach the subject more effectively.
- Links with parents are good and they are positive about the school and how it provides for their children. The inclusion team makes an exceptional contribution to this, promoting pupils' social and pastoral needs, liaising with families, and ensuring all pupils are included. They have made a major contribution to improved attendance, and to ensuring that the school's procedures to safeguard pupils meet requirements.
- The local authority, after an initial period when the staff felt they lacked support when the substantive headteacher was first absent, has been very helpful in dealing with some difficult human resource issues. The school has drawn on a variety of other outside help to support it, including a local leader in education, and specialist advice for the Reception and Nursery staff. In particular, an external review from the staff from a group of other schools, the Greet Teaching School Alliance, has provided an invaluable external view, and a benchmark to assess developments against.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body was reconstituted last year, and co-opted a number of members who had specific expertise to help it move forward. It has worked successfully during the year with senior staff to develop systems that give governors a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They use data effectively to keep a track on pupils' achievement, and compare it with other schools. Governors keep a good track on the quality of teaching through performance management systems. They are increasingly able to hold the school to account by asking challenging questions of staff as well as providing support, for example in monitoring health and safety issues. They have ensured that funding for the pupil premium and for sports have been used well, and are clear about the successful impact.

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	131725
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	444116

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	460
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Couchman
Interim Headteacher	Janet Weatherley
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2010
Telephone number	0121 464 3792
Fax number	0121 464 5519
Email address	enquiry@firs.bham.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)
[Store St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2014

