

Maple Tree Lower School

Hawk Drive, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2WA

Inspection dates 21–22 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	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.

- The headteacher and the governing body are ambitious for the school and have worked well together to raise pupils' standards of attainment and progress.
- The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. Teaching is carefully planned so that all pupils are appropriately supported and challenged.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics, reading and writing.
- Pupils feel safe in school. Parents are very positive about the school's excellent approach to the care and support of their children.
- The school encourages its pupils to read widely and often. The well-stocked library and easy access to books in classrooms help to foster their love of reading.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. They behave very well around the school and in class and this contributes significantly to their good achievement.
- The school helps pupils to understand how to look after their school and each other very well. This is reflected in the positive and friendly atmosphere around the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough of the teaching is yet outstanding.
- Attendance is only broadly in line with national averages.
- In their marking of pupils' work, teachers' guidance is not always specific enough to enable pupils to improve their work effectively.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 15 lessons across all the year groups, including seven seen jointly with members of the senior management team.
- The inspection team held meetings with school leaders, governors, a representative from the local authority and a group of pupils. They also heard some pupils read, attended an assembly and visited the school’s breakfast and after-school clubs.
- Inspectors examined a range of documents including the school’s improvement plan, records of pupils’ progress, documents relating to how pupils are kept safe, and the school’s own evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors also looked at the work in pupils’ books.
- The views of 37 parents and carers were analysed through the Parent View website.
- The views of 18 staff who returned questionnaires were also considered.

Inspection team

Gillian Scobie, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Cynthia Ashford	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is broadly similar in size to the average primary school. The large majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding is well below the national average. This is additional government funding for particular groups and in this school includes pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly in line with national averages. The proportion of pupils supported by school action is below the national average.
- Due to the number of children in each year group some pupils work in mixed year classes.
- The school runs a breakfast club and an afternoon club for its pupils.
- The school works within a local Trust which includes an upper school, a middle school and six lower schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding by:
 - ensuring that teachers continue to share and develop the examples of outstanding teaching that already exist across the school
 - ensuring that, in teachers' marking, the guidance given to pupils as to the next steps they need to take is appropriately detailed and specific enough to allow them to respond effectively and improve their work.
- Continue to develop effective strategies to improve attendance.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils join the Reception class with knowledge and skills similar to those expected for their age except in communication skills which are below national expectations. The majority attend the school's Nursery which offers them a good basis for their future learning. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, especially in communication skills, so that by the end of Reception all pupils meet expected levels, and some are slightly exceeding the expected standards in literacy, numeracy and social skills.
- Standards in Year 4 have improved since the last inspection and are above national expectations. School records show that on average pupils are working at least three terms ahead of national expectations in reading, two terms ahead in writing and at least one term ahead in mathematics.
- Pupils make good progress in Years 1 and 2. The increased emphasis on the teaching of mathematics has ensured that standards in mathematics are now as strong as those in reading, which are securely above average. Standards are not yet as high in writing, but pupils are working above national expectations.
- Where pupils are in mixed year classes, teachers and teaching assistants ensure that pupils of all ages and abilities have work that is at just the right level of difficulty. As a result, these pupils work confidently, make good progress and achieve as well as pupils in classes where there is only one year group.
- School records show that there has been rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the school since the last inspection. Increased emphasis on whole-school planning and rigorous monitoring of pupils' progress have ensured that all groups are appropriately catered for. Consequently, most pupils have made more than expected progress from their different starting points.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress in all their subjects from their different starting points. Teachers and other adults work well together to ensure that these pupils are always engaged and included, and as a result, they enjoy their learning.
- The school has worked successfully to support the small group of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding. Very small numbers in each year group make it difficult to comment on their attainment without identifying individuals. However they are making good progress and, in general, work at the same level as their peers in reading, writing and mathematics.
- In the 2013 Year 1 phonics screening check the majority of pupils achieved the expected level and nearly all the pupils who retook the test in Year 2 were successful. However, the results did not reflect the high levels of attainment in reading that exist across the school.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching over time is good and there are instances of outstanding practice, especially in the planning of lessons to ensure that all groups, including the most able, are appropriately challenged and supported, and in the checking of pupils' progress.

- Teachers are enthusiastic and have good subject knowledge. They find a wide range of ways to engage and challenge their pupils, and as a result, pupils enjoy their learning and make good progress.
- Teachers have high expectations for their pupils and value their ideas and responses. They ask probing questions and give the pupils time to formulate their answers, which helps them become confident learners and willing to express their views and ideas to the teacher and to each other.
- Teachers know their pupils well and carefully check their progress in class. They quickly offer further explanations when a group or an individual needs more help. For example, in a mathematics lesson, the teacher was able to give certain pupils clearer guidance using a visual example to explain the more difficult aspects of a problem using fractions. This enabled them to solve the problem and make good and sustained progress for the rest of the lesson.
- Teachers and other adults work well together to ensure that every pupil has just the right level of support. As a result, all pupils, including those with disabilities, those with special educational needs and those eligible for pupil premium funding, make good progress from their different starting points.
- Homework is set regularly and includes elements of reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils are given a choice of tasks to consolidate the skills and knowledge covered in class each week. Each half-term, pupils are offered a family task that enables parents and carers to be aware of what their children are learning and the skills that are being developed in class.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly and highlights what has been done well and the areas for improvement. However, the guidance on how to improve their work is not always sufficiently detailed to help pupils progress quickly and effectively.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is engaging and ensures that children have a wide range of opportunities to develop their skills. A lesson about healthy eating led to a choice of tasks including making pizzas, spaghetti writing and arranging flights with a travel agent. The tracking of children's progress is outstanding and uses a range of methods from computer programmes to sticky notes to ensure that each child's progress is efficiently and effectively recorded.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils behave well in lessons, and around the school. The school's emphasis on positive values is shared in assemblies and in lessons and, as a result, pupils show a high level of respect for each other, their teachers and their school.
- Pupils say they enjoy school and consistently demonstrate a positive attitude to learning. This is reflected in the good and improving progress they make. They are very keen to share what they have done in class with visitors and talk enthusiastically about their lessons.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel safe at school and this is reflected in the positive responses to the Parent View survey. Pupils have confidence in their teachers to look after them well. The school helps them to understand how to keep themselves safe outside school and when using the internet.
- Instances of bullying are very rare in school and pupils are confident that, should an incident

occur, it is quickly and effectively dealt with, and the friendly atmosphere is quickly restored.

- Pupils enjoy the breakfast club and after-school club that the school provides for them. They are able to have a drink and a snack and have time to spend time with friends or doing their homework. Parents collecting pupils were full of praise for the facility that keeps their children safe and happy.
- Attendance continues to be broadly in line with national averages. The school has worked closely with other schools in the Trust to find ways to improve further the pattern of attendance, and has brought in a range of strategies, such as attendance assemblies and individual rewards for full attendance, but it is too soon for these to have had a positive impact.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and the governors work well together. They are very ambitious for the school and have worked hard since the last inspection to improve standards across the school. They have the full support of staff, who feel there have been huge improvements across all aspects of the school.
- The headteacher knows her staff very well and they have benefitted from the improved opportunities to develop their range of professional knowledge and skills. This has improved the quality of teaching and learning and pupils are now making good progress. The school recognises the need to share more widely the examples of the best teaching.
- The school evaluates its strengths and weaknesses realistically and has set practical targets for improvement. As a result, there have been marked improvements in teaching and in the checking of progress since the last inspection. Leaders at all levels use the information to help them work cooperatively with class teachers to ensure that all pupils are achieving their best and any signs of difficulties can be quickly tackled.
- The curriculum is well planned to stimulate learning and ensure that all pupils are able to achieve well. It encourages pupils to be creative and builds upon stories and books that appeal to them. It is used well to fire their imagination and foster a love of learning. The school's values are woven through the subjects so that pupils are able to develop social, moral and spiritual awareness, as well as having a good understanding of other cultures and customs.
- The school has worked closely with the local authority to improve the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection. School leaders have moved the school forward quickly and effectively and the local authority representative was full of praise for the rapidity with which this has been addressed. He is fully confident, rightly, that the school has the capacity to continue to improve.
- The management of all available funding is closely and rigorously monitored by the governing body. The pupil premium funding has been used effectively to support the learning needs of individual children and to ensure that they are able to participate in all the activities available to them. As a result eligible pupils make good progress, and their attainment generally is similar to that of their classmates.
- The primary school sports funding has been used effectively to develop a range of alternative sports and gymnastic activities that engage the interest of the more reluctant pupils. The school works closely with the schools in the Trust to increase opportunities to compete; the team leaving for a 'quick cricket' contest were full of enthusiasm for their physical education lessons.

- The school works well with parents and arranges a number of opportunities for parents and carers to attend assemblies and work with pupils to celebrate Mothers' Day and other festivals. They are encouraged to read with the children at home.
- The school takes its responsibilities for safeguarding very seriously and there are robust measures in place to keep the pupils safe.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is rightly proud of the progress the school has made since the last inspection. It contains an excellent range of skills and knowledge and governors know the school very well. They understand their role clearly, visit regularly and give the headteacher outstanding support in guiding improvements. They receive regular reports from the headteacher and have a clear understanding of the data presented to them on the quality of teaching and pupils' performance. Governors regularly ask for clarification and challenge the information they receive. Targets set for the headteacher and her staff are informed by the 'Teachers' Standards' and the school development plan, and are closely linked to outcomes to ensure that good results are appropriately rewarded. Governors know how the school budget is spent and monitor the positive impact of pupil premium and primary sports funding on progress and standards. They have good relationships with parents and carers, who receive a termly newsletter giving them key information about school life.

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	132236
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	442062

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

Type of school	First
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	213
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andy Shaw
Headteacher	Pauline Duncombe
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2013
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