

St Andrew's CofE VA Primary School, Hitchin

Benslow Lane, Hitchin, SG4 9RD

Inspection dates

18–19 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	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.

- Teaching is usually good and some is outstanding. As a consequence, most pupils' make at least expected progress and many exceed expectations. Standards in English and mathematics are above average.
- The most-able pupils achieve particularly well in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The headteacher and governors provide effective leadership. They are well informed about the school's work and ensure that plans for improving teaching and achievement are successful.
- The restructuring of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved children's learning. This year all Reception children have achieved a good level of development.
- Pupils' behaviour and their understanding of how to stay safe are good. They mix well and are sensitive to the needs of others. The school has not excluded any pupils since 2009.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through the school's strong values and enriched curriculum.
- Classrooms are welcoming and inviting spaces for learning. Resources to support learning and to encourage positive behaviour are good.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Across Key Stage 2 some pupils do not make as much progress in mathematics as they do in reading and writing.
- The often excellent skills of senior leaders are not always spread as widely as they could be across other areas of the school. The leadership of some subjects outside English and mathematics is not strong enough.
- The best teaching is not always shared widely across the school.
- While the very large majority of parents are strong supporters of the school, a few are dissatisfied with aspects of its work, especially communication between home and school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching and learning over time. This included 16 observations of parts of lessons (some seen together with the headteacher) taught by class teachers or specialist teachers. They looked at pupils' written work in exercise books, examples of work on display and the school's latest information about teaching and pupils' achievement.
- A number of pupils in Years 1, 2 and 6 read to inspectors and talked to them about their books.
- Meetings were held with pupils, parents and carers, key leaders and members of the governing body. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents including information about pupils' attendance and behaviour, plans for future improvement, self-evaluation and minutes of meetings held by the governing body. Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils and arrangements for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs were examined.
- The views of the 122 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, along with eight letters received from parents and 21 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Linda Killman, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Wendy Varney

Her Majesty's Inspector

Glen Goddard

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. A very small minority are from a range of different minority ethnic heritages. The proportion speaking English as an additional language is below average.
- A few pupils are eligible for additional government funding through the pupil premium. This funding is for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, those who are looked after by the local authority and other groups.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs with a statement or who are supported at school action plus is in line with the national average. A very small minority of pupils are supported at school action.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment by the end of Year 6.
- Before- and after-school care is hosted on the premises. This provision is registered with Ofsted but privately run and subject to a separate inspection.
- Turnover of teaching staff has been untypically high during this school year. The headteacher has been in post for less than two years.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress that all pupils make in mathematics across Key Stage 2 by:
 - ensuring that the subject leader identifies and then tackles the root causes that are preventing some pupils from making more than expected progress
 - sharing best practice in teaching the subject more widely across the school.
- Increase the strength and effectiveness of the school's leadership by:
 - ensuring that all senior leaders help develop the skills of other staff by leading improvements in teaching and learning beyond their own classes
 - improving the leadership and management of subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Take further steps to improve communication between parents and the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Children start in the nursery with skills that are at least typical for their age. They make good progress to the end of Reception. When they move into Year 1 the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is significantly higher than the national average, with all children reaching a good level this year.
- Across the school standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics are above average. Over time, pupils in Years 1 and 2 have consistently made good progress from their individual starting points. The reason for the below-average results in the Year 1 phonics (letters and sounds) screening check in 2013 has been addressed successfully and rectified this year.
- Inspectors found that pupils of all ages develop a passion for reading and books. They read confidently, with expression and with considerable maturity for their ages. One pupil said 'I absolutely love reading. In fact I like to read more than playing!'
- The proportions of pupils making expected and better than expected progress in reading and writing between Year 2 and Year 6 compare favourably with national figures. However, progress in mathematics has been more variable over time, as seen in the 2013 national data. The school is working hard to correct this and almost all of the current Year 6 pupils have made at least two levels of progress as expected in all subjects from their starting points in Year 3.
- Disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress because the extra help they receive is very good. Support staff are well trained and lead carefully-planned programmes expertly, with the result that pupils stride ahead confidently in their learning. Additional support for pupils who have a statement for their special educational needs is offered sensitively, enabling them to integrate well with other pupils and make suitable progress in group and class activities.
- There were no pupils leaving Year 6 last year who were eligible for the pupil premium and too few in the school as a whole to make a reliable comment on their attainment. School data confirms that the school generally uses the pupil premium effectively to narrow the gap between eligible pupils' achievement and that of others and to ensure this group also makes good progress. The few pupils who do qualify for additional funding make expected progress in mathematics and more than this in reading and writing. Some of the funding has been used to develop teachers' skills in teaching specially-designed programmes to raise their achievement and this has made a significant difference to the learning of this group across the school.
- Most of the most-able pupils achieve well in all subjects because they are given work which stretches them and allows them to fulfil their true potential. Around a quarter of pupils in Year 6, for example, sat the demanding Level 6 test papers in the national tests this year. Their attainment exceeds national expectations for the end of primary school by a very wide margin.
- Standards in art, craft and design, particularly drawing and printing, are generally above those usually seen in pupils of this age. Pupils' finished pieces currently on exhibition in the school's gallery are of good quality and show that they learn about art from different countries and continents. Enthusiasm for the subject is strong and promoted well through art projects that sometimes involve other schools and the wider community; this contributes to pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The new primary sports funding has been used effectively to train staff, extend the range of

clubs and increase pupils' involvement in competitive inter-school sports. Pupils have good attitude to physical education. They all like to swim in the school pool and the very large majority leave the school as proficient swimmers.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is invariably good and some is outstanding. However, examples of the best teaching are not shared widely enough across the school so that others may learn from them and move their teaching to the next level.
- Teaching across the Early Years Foundation Stage is of consistently good quality, which is why Reception children are now reaching a good level of development in all areas. Opportunities for children to develop their phonics skills to read and write short sentences are plentiful and used effectively. Adults' expectations are high for children to develop confidence and independence allowing opportunities for children to explore and experiment without premature intervention.
- The way teachers question pupils to check and extend their understanding is good in most classes across the school. The school's records show that this has strengthened pupils' skills in speaking and listening and sharpened their subject knowledge and understanding. Teachers make sure that pupils systematically improve their ability to discuss, reflect on and share their ideas with others as they move through the school.
- Teachers ensure that their judgements about how well pupils are learning and the level of their attainment are accurate, which, historically, has not always been the case. They use evidence of pupils' work to support their judgements and these are verified by another teacher from within or outside the school. This is improving teachers' capacity to check that pupils are making sufficient progress so that they can take swift action if their learning stalls.
- Marking and feedback are generally timely and teachers ensure that pupils act on their advice. Planning for learning is effective and ensures that pupils are working at the right level, especially in the case of pupils requiring extra help or who need to be supported in booster classes. The staff provide additional sessions for some pupils before and after school to ensure that they do not miss out on other important learning.
- The role of teaching assistants has been developed very well through training. They make a valuable contribution in supporting and promoting pupils' good learning. They are effective, both when supporting pupils individually and when working with groups, and are skilled in adapting learning activities quickly where necessary so that pupils continue to make sufficient progress.
- Specialist teachers and coaches contribute to pupils' good achievement in a range of subjects such as mathematics, swimming and music and provide additional challenge for the most-able learners. Pupils made good progress with the specialist music teacher, for example, as they learned how to control sounds and play percussion instruments with increasing accuracy to convey the rhythms of Brazilian samba. This is also an example of how teachers capitalise skilfully on pupils' interests to motivate them.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Year 6 pupils were keen to tell inspectors how good their behaviour is when they are participating in activities in the local community or during residential visits. Both in lessons and at play, they are polite, well-mannered and treat visitors with respect.

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Older pupils showed a good level of understanding in how to keep themselves safe and were able to explain different types of bullying. Some pupils said that the school acts quickly and effectively to help to resolve conflict should it occur. Others felt less confident and preferred to tell their parents first so that they could come in and talk through the issue with staff on their behalf.
- Play times run smoothly and pupils mix well ensuring that no-one is left out. They use the challenging climbing equipment sensibly, showing good attention to safety and an awareness of the importance of sticking to the rules.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Their written work is careful and tidy and they show pride in it. They respond very well to teachers' marking, using it to improve their original pieces. Year 2 pupils enjoy using their special 'polishing pens' to correct their work.
- Attendance is consistently higher than the national average and the headteacher has had no cause to exclude any pupils.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has played a pivotal role in increasing accountability of staff at all levels. This has been achieved through regular meetings to discuss pupils' achievement and effective use of performance management and appraisal systems. Where teaching is identified as less than good, appropriate action is quickly taken, for example by providing coaching or instituting plans for improvement; these measures invariably ensure that weaknesses are corrected swiftly.
- Staff morale is good. They recognise that this year has been particularly challenging because of the need to adapt to new ways of working and the unusually high turnover of teaching staff. They have, however, worked together well as a team and have shown resolve and professionalism in overcoming these difficulties.
- The coordinator for special educational needs (SENDCO) oversees and advises on provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs effectively. Parental satisfaction is variable, with some parents full of praise for all that the school has done to help their children progress but others who feel that it could do more. Nonetheless, systems for checking the achievement of these pupils are thorough and implemented consistently by staff, which has contributed to their good progress from their individual starting points.
- The assistant headteacher's excellent knowledge of early years education enables her to provide strong guidance and good-quality training and coaching for staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage. As a consequence, provision for learning in Nursery and Reception has improved and is securely good in all respects. Her skills as an excellent teacher are not always spread as widely as they could be across other areas of the school to benefit more staff.
- The leaders of literacy and mathematics have made good progress in developing the effectiveness of their subjects across the school. Both are prepared for the introduction of the new curriculum from September. However, the school has not yet been able to pinpoint why, across the school generally, pupils' achievement in mathematics in Key Stage 2 is sometimes weaker than in English.
- Leaders for subjects other than English and mathematics are few in number. While those who have responsibilities for subjects generally lead them well, there are subjects that are not given the same level of attention. Leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning in these

subjects has not brought the same level of improvement in these subjects as it has elsewhere, for example, in English.

- Pupils enjoy access to a broad and balanced curriculum that promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well and helps them to prepare for their future lives in modern Britain. Pupils speak highly of the enrichment activities that they participate in especially in sport and the arts.
- The local authority provides a suitable level of support for the school. This year, input from advisers and consultants has been helpful in improving provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school also benefits from strong links with other schools to share the best practice.
- Inspectors gathered the views of parents and carers in a number of ways and found that the level of satisfaction is variable. Key leaders are conscious that the school must do better in its communication with families. They have reflected upon where and why it has not always been successful in the past and have begun to take appropriate action to improve it.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is effective. Governors are well informed and bring to the table a range of useful skills. They keep in close touch with all aspects of the school's work by carrying out a range of checks such a survey to gather pupils' views about the school. They know what the quality of teaching is like and both challenge and support the school in pursuit of improvements in teaching and learning. Data are understood well and used to form an independent view of strengths and weaknesses in pupils' achievement. Governors have been involved in decisions about how the pupil premium funding is spent and expect to see return for the funding in terms of eligible pupils' improved achievement. They ensure that reviews of the performance of each teacher are carried out, and that any pay awards are linked to pupils' achievement. Finances are managed well and safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

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	117467
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	447134

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	270
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rebecca Rawling
Headteacher	Deborah Fenn
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2009
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