

Alexandra Infants' School

Melville Road, Normacot, Stoke-on-Trent, ST3 4PZ

Inspection dates 24–25 June 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' achievement requires improvement because some pupils do not make enough progress in Reception and Year 1.
- The quality of teaching requires improvement. Teachers do not always base lessons on an accurate assessment of pupils' reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teachers' marking is not always good enough and sometimes pupils do not have the opportunity to respond. Comments are not clear enough to enable parents to help their children with their reading.
- Sometimes pupils do not have opportunities to talk through what they have been asked to write about, especially pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Gaps in pupils' mathematics knowledge are not identified and addressed quickly enough.
- Behaviour systems are not effective enough in the Reception Year or at lunchtime.
- School leaders do not ensure all staff are trained in the use of consistent and effective strategies to manage the behaviour of some of the youngest children.
- The monitoring of the quality of teaching is not shared among middle leaders.
- The governing body does not raise enough awareness with some parents about the importance of regular attendance and punctuality.
- Many staff changes have had a negative effect on the quality of teaching and learning.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have shown strong leadership during times of turbulence in staffing. The school is improving.
- Nursery children gain good early reading skills.
- Pupils are well cared for.
- School leaders and governors now have a very clear view of how successful the school can be and what needs to be done to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement further, such as sharing the exemplary practice in Year 2.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 15 part-lessons. Two lessons were observed jointly with the headteacher and with the deputy headteacher respectively. Inspectors also make shorter visits to a number of lessons. They listened to pupils read in Reception, Year 1, Year 2 and to some pupils who have special educational needs. The teaching of letters and the sounds they make (phonics) was observed in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2.
- Separate meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff, groups of pupils and a telephone discussion was held with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors were not able to review the information from the online parent questionnaire (Parent View) as too few parents responded. However, three separate meetings were held with parents to gather their views about the school and inspectors spoke with parents in the playground before and after school.
- Inspectors took account of the views of staff from 33 inspection questionnaires.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation including national assessment information, the school's assessment of pupils' learning, the school's view of its own performance, local authority reports, information about the subjects that pupils study, pupils' work and safeguarding and attendance documents.

Inspection team

Jean Tarry, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Stephen Helm

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Alexandra Infants' School is an average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported by pupil premium funding is higher than the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs supported through school action is higher than the average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- A large majority of pupils are from minority ethnic groups. Just over half of all pupils are of Pakistani heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is increasing and is well above the average. The school employs a number of bilingual teaching assistants.
- The school offers nurture group provision in the 'Butterfly Room' in the afternoons.
- The school has had a period of staffing instability, particularly in Reception and Year 1.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to be consistently good and better and so raise the achievement of all pupils, and in particular in Reception and Year 1, by:
 - ensuring teachers accurately assess what pupils know and what they need to learn next in order to plan worthwhile activities in reading, writing and mathematics
 - ensuring teachers' comments on pupils' reading are consistently evaluative so that pupils know what to do next to improve and parents know how to help
 - ensuring that pupils, including those who speak English as an additional language, have opportunities to engage in and explore spoken English to help them with their writing tasks
 - ensuring that gaps in pupils' mathematical knowledge are quickly identified and addressed
 - ensuring marking is of a consistently good quality and that pupils have the opportunity to respond to the comments on a regular basis in order to learn from their mistakes and improve.
- Improve the quality of the leadership and management at all levels by:
 - ensuring the exemplary practice in Year 2 is shared effectively across the whole school
 - ensuring governance engages more effectively with parents to encourage and achieve good attendance and punctuality
 - ensuring all staff are consistent in their use of strategies to manage how pupils behave both in Reception and on the playground
 - ensuring that all staff are trained to manage expertly the behaviour of very young children with specific needs
 - ensuring the monitoring of the quality of teaching is shared among all leaders, including middle leaders.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Children start school with skills and knowledge that are well below those typical for their age, especially in literacy and social skills. Many enter school speaking little or no English. They make variable progress over time in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Their achievement requires improvement because when children leave Reception Year, many have not reached a good level of development. Even so, this is now improving.
- Pupils make variable progress across Key Stage 1. Progress in Year 1 requires improvement because, over time, pupils have not done well enough. School leaders believe that this may be due to a succession of different staff members over a period of time. In Year 2, progress has been much better over time.
- Pupils' attainment in 2013 improved. From very low starting points, pupils are now reaching generally average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards have improved since the last inspection, particularly in reading. In 2013, standards in reading were the highest they have ever been. Reading has been a school focus. School data, confirmed by the inspection evidence, show that this improving trend is set to continue this year. In national tests, pupils in Year 2 in 2013 made the progress expected of them in reading, writing and mathematics compared to the national average. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher levels in reading and mathematics was in line with the national picture and confirms that the achievement of the most able pupils is improving. Writing is not as strong and this is mainly due to the fact that some pupils do not have long enough to articulate their thoughts before they are asked to write.
- Children in the Nursery make good gains in learning letters and the sounds that they make, and this prepares them well for early reading. However, the picture is not as good in Reception and Year 1 because tasks are often not well matched to the needs of the children. In Year 2, pupils develop a real love of reading because they engage in a variety of different reading materials. Reading takes a high priority across the school, with a library and initiatives such as daily readers or guided reading groups. Attainment is rising in reading at the end of Year 2. The progress the most able pupils make with their comprehension tasks in reading is improving, especially in Year 2.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make variable progress, especially in Reception and Year 1, because expectations and methods have been inconsistent due to changes in staffing over time. The extra support given to help these pupils with their basic skills is having a good effect on the progress they are making in their reading, writing and mathematics.
- The pupil premium funding ensures that pupils eligible for this support, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, are making progress similar to that of other pupils in English and mathematics. This group made at least good progress in Year 2 in 2013. The current school data and inspection evidence show that any gaps in attainment in English and mathematics are closing. Despite this success, the school knows it must not allow the variability in how well pupils have done in the past to recur if it is to fully promote equality of opportunity for all its pupils.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it has not resulted in good progress over time in pupils' work. Often, teachers do not accurately assess what pupils know and what they need to learn next in order to plan really purposeful activities in reading, writing and mathematics to improve their learning further.
- Classteachers spend time marking pupils' work. However, sometimes the marking is not good and some pupils in some classes do not respond to the teachers' comments. Teachers' comments on pupils' reading skills are not always evaluative and informative, particularly in Reception and Year 1. This means that misconceptions are not addressed and progress slows down.

- Sometimes the quality of teaching supports pupils very well indeed, and so they achieve rapid results. For example, in a mathematics lesson during the inspection, pupils identified the properties of irregular shapes and were given an opportunity to explore mathematical language. The work set by the teacher was purposeful, well matched to the pupils' needs, relevant and engaging, and pupils knew what they had to do next to improve. This high-quality mathematical provision is not consistent across the school; often gaps in pupils' knowledge are not quickly identified or addressed soon enough.
- Sometimes pupils are given an opportunity to develop their language skills by discussing tasks. For example, pupils talked about precious items and this prepared them really well for their writing task. However, due to staffing changes, a focus on developing spoken English over time has not been consistently effective.
- The teaching of letters and the sounds they make is not of good quality in Reception and Year 1. Tasks are sometimes not well matched to pupils' needs, and teachers and teaching assistants are still developing their skills in this area of teaching. However, it is a much better picture in Year 2 and school data confirm this.
- Teachers track the progress of the pupils who have special educational needs but do not always work effectively with specialist practitioners. Often teachers do not check that the provision is of a high enough quality to impact on all the pupils' learning. This is especially so in Reception, where there is a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and, sometimes, provision is not always well matched to the pupils' specific needs.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- The picture is a mixed one. Sometimes the boys' attitudes in the playground require some improvement, because some do not have any regard for other pupils who want to play quietly. However, some pupils have more positive attitudes and help as corridor monitors, for example, or make a difference to the school as members of the school council. This involvement often contributes to their good progress. There are also some sensible pupils who are good role models for the younger pupils. For example, some older pupils helped others to get the playground equipment out for others to play with.
- Most pupils wear their school uniforms smartly but not all parents support the school's view about school uniform. Some pupils are good at keeping the school environment tidy; for example, they pick up litter and coats off the floor. Not all pupils see this as important and expect someone else to do it for them.
- Attendance is low and this is mainly due to holidays taken in term time by pupils visiting family members in other countries. Some parents do not appreciate the importance of punctuality or regular attendance and the impact this is having on their children's learning. There are monitoring systems in place and links with parents are good. However, these are not as effective as they could be and the governors know this.
- The teachers and some teaching assistants in Reception do not work together consistently well in managing children. Some assistants are not developing the skills needed to support pupils who have very challenging behavioural needs. Specialist training has not been used effectively to support adults or children.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is generally good. Parents and staff believe that pupils feel safe, secure and happy in school. Pupils know about name-calling and physical bullying and say that it sometimes occurs. However, they do know to whom they can talk if this happens. They do not always know how to keep themselves safe but they do talk sensibly about the potential dangers of the internet.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher are effective because they know the strengths and the

areas of weakness in the school. They have a very accurate, clear and concise overview of the provision and outcomes for all the pupils at the school. The headteacher insists that teachers check on the progress pupils are making from their starting points in order to drive improvement.

- The monitoring of the quality of teaching carried out by the headteacher is accurate. However, the responsibility has not been shared and the task is far too big for one person to complete. This work has led to improvements in teaching across Nursery and Year 2 over time but not in other year groups. The school leadership team, including middle leaders, has been depleted due to staff absence and maternity leave. The headteacher holds staff to account for the progress of all pupils and their success determines teachers' movement up the pay scale.
- The headteacher and teachers in some year groups assess pupils' knowledge and skills really well. This means that the school's data that track pupils' attainment and progress are usually effective and reliable. However, this has not always been the case in Reception and Year 1 due to constant staff changes.
- The headteacher checks how well additional funds are used. For example, pupil premium funding is used to provide a range of support including targeted group work. The new primary school sport funding is used to improve pupils' achievement, health and well-being through sporting opportunities delivered by a coach. The impact of this funding can be seen in outcomes for pupils, which are good, and in how well pupils are prepared for their transition to the local junior school.
- The school has partnerships with external agencies and this is helping to ensure pupils with special educational needs often make the progress expected of them. However, the leadership and management do not ensure that all staff are specially trained in the use of consistent strategies to manage the behaviour of some very young children who have quite specific needs.
- The range of lessons and activities on offer meets the needs of most pupils. It ensures that pupils achieve in line with the national average and make the progress expected of them from their starting points. There is a positive impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of learning and their overall development. Most pupils thrive in this school community, which many hardworking staff describe as a safe, caring learning environment.
- The local authority is continuing to provide a range of appropriate support. For example, a Director of Learning and a Senior Educational Welfare Officer are helping to improve pupils' attendance and progress over time. Alexandra Infants' is regarded as a school that has strong leadership but has been plagued with recent staffing issues and further stretched with an influx of pupils with challenging behaviour. The support and help from the local authority are leading to improvements in teaching and pupils' achievement, particularly in Year 2, following the dips in both since the last inspection.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have an accurate view of pupils' achievement through analysing performance data, and are clear about the quality of teaching. They have constantly ensured the headteacher has addressed identified weaknesses in teaching and checked that performance management systems are implemented effectively.
 - Governors ensure that the pupil premium funding is allocated to support the learning of those pupils for whom it is intended; they have checked closely why this support has been effective in narrowing the gap in the attainment of eligible pupils compared with that of similar pupils nationally.
 - Governors do not, however, engage effectively with parents on issues such as school uniform, attendance and punctuality.
 - Statutory duties are fulfilled and meet requirements; discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. This is a fully inclusive school.

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

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| Unique reference number | 124011 |
| Local authority | Stoke-on-Trent |
| Inspection number | 442643 |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3–7 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 197 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | J Donaldson |
| Headteacher | Linda Pennington |
| Date of previous school inspection | 6 October 2010 |
| Telephone number | 01782 235505 |
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