

Manor Fields Primary School

Penningtons, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 4LE

Inspection dates

17–18 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- The governing body has not been thorough in checking that all statutory requirements are met and that new guidance is implemented promptly.
- Following a comprehensive restructure, the governing body is in the early stages of rebuilding its capacity so that it can provide effective governance that fulfils its core functions.
- Leadership across the full range of subjects varies in quality. In subjects such as history, geography and religious education pupils' learning is not planned in a sequential, systematic way to build continuous progression in acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Pupils achieve well academically, but the presentation of their written work does not match the good quality of its content.
- Pupils have not developed their skills in handwriting well enough. Worksheets are used too much. Sometimes teachers use them when pupils are capable of recording the information without a pre-populated format.

The school has the following strengths

- New senior leaders provide an effective professional team. They make well-judged decisions and are driving forward improvements rapidly, raising staff morale and improving relationships with parents and carers.
- Leadership in the Early Years Foundation Stage is effective and ensures that most children reach a good level of development by the end of Reception.
- Good teaching over time in English and mathematics enables most pupils to make good progress and achieve above average standards.
- Well-designed additional provision for all learners at greatest risk of falling behind helps them to maintain good progress.

Information about this inspection

- The school had no prior notice of this inspection. Ofsted's decision to inspect the school was mainly due to issues arising from three qualifying complaints in relation to achievement, leadership and management. Inspectors were not required to investigate the individual complaints, but the wider concerns raised by them were followed up in detail during the inspection.
- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching and learning over time. This included 20 observations in lessons (some seen together with the headteacher) taught by class teachers or specialist teachers. They looked at a wide range of pupils' work from the previous and current school years, and took into account the school's prior and latest information about teaching and the achievement of all groups of pupils.
- Provision for disadvantaged pupils, the most able learners, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs was explored, including a thorough analysis of several individual cases selected by inspectors.
- A few pupils in Years 1 and 2 read to inspectors and talked to them about their books.
- Meetings were held with pupils, parents and carers, key leaders, members of the governing body and 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, its self-evaluation and plans for future improvement, the curriculum, reports from professionals outside the school, minutes of meetings held by the governing body and records relating to finance.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including the single central register (a spreadsheet showing all of the safeguarding checks made on staff prior to appointment).
- This inspection was part of Ofsted's Parent View (online questionnaire) pilot for free text comments from parents and carers. The views of the 134 parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were taken into account along with 39 responses to a staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Linda Killman, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Paul Lawrence

Seconded Inspector

Michael Miller

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is larger than most other primary schools.
- Most pupils are White British. Others are from a range of different minority ethnic heritages. The proportion speaking English as an additional language is below average.
- Very 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 is below the national average. The proportion supported through an education, health and care plan or a statement is well-below average.
- 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.
- Following an external review of governance in April 2014 the governing body has been restructured and a new Chair and vice-chair have been elected.
- The previous permanent headteacher resigned at the end of the July 2014 after 12 months in post. On behalf of the governing body, the local authority commissioned two part-time interim headteachers who have stepped in to lead the school until the next headteacher is appointed. The deputy headteacher and ten teaching staff are new to the school this term.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- The governing body must improve its performance and effectiveness by:
 - making regular checks to confirm that all statutory requirements are met in full and that new statutory guidance is implemented promptly
 - injecting more rigour into strategically monitoring the school's work and its finances so that governors can challenge the school about its performance and plans for future improvements
 - working as a cohesive team to make collective decisions
 - sustaining recent improvements in developing productive and supportive relationships with the headteacher, all other staff and parents
 - acting upon the recommendations and findings of the external review of governance.
- Extend the best practice in subject leadership effectively so that all leaders scrutinise curriculum planning and pupils' work routinely to check that pupils are acquiring new skills, knowledge and understanding systematically and in sequence.
- Improve the quality of pupils' written work by:
 - setting higher expectations for the presentation to match the good quality of its content
 - teaching pupils to form letters correctly to develop effective handwriting
 - avoiding unnecessary use of worksheets.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The governing body's systems and procedures for monitoring its work are weak. Self-evaluation is mostly accurate but the evaluation of leadership and management is too generous. Plans for future improvement although adequate are not detailed enough to be very effective.
- While safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements, the school's website does not.
- Curriculum planning requires improvement in some subjects. For example, in history and geography, class teachers are left to interpret statutory National Curriculum requirements for each subject and plan work for each class accordingly. Work in pupils' books shows that this sometimes leads to a lack of progression in learning from Year 1 through to Year 6 and limits aspirations for what the most-able pupils can achieve.
- Through their studies pupils develop tolerance and respect for cultural, religious and social diversity which is touched upon in many subjects including music and dance. There is no central audit to evaluate how well the curriculum is developing pupils' understanding of British values such as democracy, the rule of law and individual liberty.
- School leaders closely monitor the quality of teaching using a full range of evidence. This results in early detection of any weaknesses which are followed up quickly with support, training and development to sustain the good quality of teaching. Key leaders ensure that teachers' performance (including the headteacher's) is appraised regularly; salary increases are not automatic but are linked to meeting performance targets successfully.
- Senior leaders regularly and rigorously check the progress that all groups of pupils are making and this contributes to their good achievement. Teachers responsible for English and mathematics are strong leaders and this has contributed to the improved achievement of pupils in Year 6 in 2014.
- The school has a proper and effective new system in place for assessing pupils' learning that is aligned to the new National Curriculum requirements. With good support from senior leaders and the local authority, staff are adjusting to this new approach. Parents and carers receive regular updates on their children's progress through meetings and written reports that are informative and useful.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that teaching of religious education complies with the locally agreed syllabus. The spending of the government primary sport funding has been effective in providing all pupils with skilled specialist teaching, opening up more opportunities to attend extra-curricular sports clubs and enabling pupils to take part in a much wider range of competitive fixtures.
- The interim headteachers and the deputy headteacher have acted quickly to raise staff morale and restore parents' and carers' confidence in the school following the resignation of the headteacher, high turnover in teaching staff and changes in the governing body's membership. This is evident in positive responses in Parent View, discussions with staff, parents and carers and comments in the staff questionnaire. The general consensus of opinion is of confidence in the new leadership team and governors, with acknowledgement that the school is re-energised from its fresh start this year.
- All staff know that the deputy headteacher is the nominated professional for child protection. She checks that the school's robust procedures for referring pupils at risk to other professionals are working. The leadership team and governors take a sensible approach to informing pupils about the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Records of all referrals or other actions taken are kept in good order.
- The special needs and disabilities coordinator has devised and implemented new approaches to support all pupils at risk of underachievement and these are working well. Inspectors received glowing comments from individual parents about the school's flexibility in meeting the needs of pupils with medical needs, the quality of information they receive on their children's progress and how well the school works in partnership with them.

- The local authority was quick to step in and take the necessary action to ensure that concerns about leadership and management, especially governance, were tackled quickly. It is providing useful and helpful support for the school during this period of change. Governors are benefiting from extensive training as well as support in recruiting a new headteacher; specialist advisers are providing good-quality advice and guidance for the leadership team and new curriculum leaders.

■ The governance of the school:

- The minutes of the governing body's meetings from the last school year, a highly critical report following an external review of its work and discussions with the school improvement adviser and current governors provide compelling evidence that the previous governing body failed to operate effectively. Governors lacked clarity about their role and responsibilities, sometimes over-stepping their strategic role and inappropriately interfering in the school's day-to-day management. They were distracted from their core functions. The governing body did not provide the school with a clear strategy for improvement. It failed to challenge or support the headteacher and was weak at overseeing the school's financial performance.
- The governing body has been restructured and is beginning to improve. Recent extensive training has provided governors with an informed understanding of the governing body's roles, responsibilities and statutory duties. This governing body has learned from previous mistakes and is determined to make the necessary improvements; green shoots are emerging. Financial arrangements are in order and governors know where pupil premium and primary sport funding has been spent and the difference it has made to pupils' achievement. New staff have been recruited successfully; the appointment of a new headteacher is underway. Gaps have been filled in the single central register and the website is being updated. Governors are committed to working as a team. Through better communication they have contributed to parents' and carers' restored confidence in the school. There is a hill to climb to achieve fully effective governance, but the journey has begun. This governing body knows where it should be and, importantly, what it needs to do to get there.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- Behaviour is good. The pupils are well mannered young people who greet visitors, staff and their friends with respect and politeness. 'Please' and 'thank you' is commonplace. No reminders are required for pupils to conduct themselves appropriately as they move around the school.
- Pupils know the rules and usually stick to them. They have faith in lunchtime supervisors to help them resolve any difficulties they encounter. It is rare for pupils to insult each other and records show that incidents of racist comments are extremely rare but followed up appropriately should they occur.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils are very safety conscious because teachers give them plenty of information, 'especially in assemblies'. They are safe from bullying and harassment, and confirmed that no-one is left out, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.
- Pupils' understanding of e-safety is very good. They are sure about how to keep themselves safe online. They know about the importance of password protection and how misuse of social media can be upsetting for individuals. Where this has happened previously, the school has stepped in quickly to offer advice and support for pupils and parents.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are generally good. They enjoy school and most respond quickly to guidance and instruction from all staff members. Even so, they do not always take enough pride in the presentation of their work.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is strong. They are reflective and can offer reasoned views about moral, social and ethical issues. While their cultural development is promoted adequately through the teaching of religious education and other subjects, pupils lack depth in their understanding of different religious, ethnic and social groups in society and abroad.
- Attendance is above average and pupils arrive on time. Any attendance issues are followed up swiftly.

Exclusions are rare because the school is successful in meeting the needs of individual pupils who struggle to behave well and staff work in close partnership with parents and carers.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is usually good, particularly in English, mathematics, science and computing. Pupils benefit from the subject knowledge of specialist teachers of music and physical education so that they achieve well in these subjects.
- The teaching of handwriting is not sufficiently frequent, discrete or direct to improve pupils' skills and enable them to write legibly, fluently and with increasing speed. Expectations are not always high enough for the presentation of pupils' work. Worksheets are sometimes provided for pupils unnecessarily.
- Curriculum planning is well developed and most effective in English and mathematics. It is less effective in some other subjects taught through the school's 'topic' approach. Teaching staff are familiar with the requirements of the new National Curriculum and have taken account of it in their planning.
- Data about pupils' progress is interrogated regularly in meetings between class teachers and senior leaders. If progress begins to slip it is spotted quickly and suitable support given to put pupils back on track. This is why most pupils make good progress.
- The school identified that previous provision for pupils benefiting from pupil premium funding was not resulting in their better learning. In 2012 these pupils were approximately four terms behind the national average in English and mathematics, which widened to five terms in 2013. Considerable adjustments were made last year enabling most to make better than expected progress, narrowing the gap between their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics and the national average by a term and a half. Among other approaches that have made a difference, the school introduced good-quality provision for pastoral work in nurture groups, one-to-one tuition, booster sessions, regular access to learning outdoors in the school grounds (Forest School) and specialist teaching.
- Teaching promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well through a broad range of learning experiences including assemblies, theme days, educational trips, visiting speakers, musical and sporting events and outdoor activities such as Forest School.
- Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. They support pupils of all abilities in group sessions, adjusting the level of difficulty of the work to make it accessible for those with special educational needs or to challenge the most able.
- Assessment of pupils' learning is regular and accurate. The good quality of teachers' marking shows pupils how to improve their work and they take notice of the guidance they receive. The school's marking policy is implemented consistently across year groups and in the full range of subjects.
- Teachers use a wide variety of approaches and methods to keep learning fresh and interesting. The most recent approach is to offer pupils to choose their point of entry from a range of challenges fondly known by the pupils as 'the chilli challenges'. While this works well for most pupils, teachers are not always checking that the top level of challenge (red chilli) is 'hot' enough to provide enough stretch for the most able pupils.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Most pupils make good progress and standards are above the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils are well prepared for each stage of their education because they acquire the necessary skills to cope with increasing levels of difficulty. They leave as mature, confident learners completely ready for secondary school.

- Over time standards have been maintained at above national averages except in 2013 when they slipped to average in mathematics. The school tackled this determinedly and the initial results in 2014 show significant and impressive recovery; almost a quarter of pupils in Year 6 achieved Level 6 in mathematics, which is an exceedingly high level of attainment for 11-year-olds.
- The quality of pupils' handwriting does not generally match their ages and stages of development. They do not always take sufficient pride and care in the presentation of their work to match the good quality of its content.
- Most pupils move into Year 1 having reached a good level of development by the end of the Reception year. Almost three quarters of the current pupils in Year 1 achieved this level, which exceeds national average figures. From Year 1 onwards most pupils continue to achieve at least the expected progress and the majority make even more.
- Pupils are proficient readers who read widely and often for research and for pleasure. Their skills develop well through good teaching of phonics (letters and sounds) from an early age, as evidenced by the above average results in the national phonics screening check in Years 1 and 2. One pupil remarked 'I read every day at home and at school because I enjoy it and I want to be smart!'
- Almost all pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, those who speak English as an additional language, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and those supported through pupil premium funding achieve as well as others. Their needs are met well through the school's provision and action follows quickly if their learning should falter.
- The brightest pupils achieve well in English, mathematics and science. In some other subjects they are not pushed hard enough to reach the high levels of scholastic excellence of which they are capable.
- Pupils' achievement in music and physical education is above that usually seen. They develop proficient skills in singing and playing musical instruments and advanced skills in a broad range of physical activities.

The early years provision

is good

- Effective leadership ensures that provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is consistently good from entry into the Nursery through to the end of the Reception year. Most children arrive with knowledge, skills and understanding above those typical for their age and move into Year 1 having achieved a good level of development. They develop as happy, confident learners who enjoy coming to school.
- Very thorough procedures are in place to check children's starting points when they join the school. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader has developed productive relationships with staff in most of the local pre-school groups which helps in planning and preparing for each new intake. This term's starters were only a few days in school yet their routines were already becoming established.
- Good tracking of children's early development enables staff to intervene quickly when they identify gaps in children's learning or where children are exceeding expectations. Teachers and support staff are alert, observant and meticulous in recording what they see. They discuss and agree the next steps for every child's learning then focus on these when they interact with the children to move their learning on quickly.
- The Nursery and Reception classes run smoothly. Resources are eye-catching and tempt children to try and experiment. For example, children in the Nursery were fascinated by the different ways that paperclips, metal tacks, pipe cleaners and other materials trapped inside plastic bottles reacted to the force of magnetism.
- The adults are skilful practitioners. They allow the children freedom to choose from a range of activities where they try new things and develop their own ideas during 'Sparkle Time' which staff say 'is every

child's chance to shine'. Equally, adults know when to join with them in play, taking the opportunity to teach children new skills, deepening their immersion in make-believe play or developing their literacy, numeracy and personal skills.

- Children make a very good start in developing their social skills as well as their early reading, writing and number skills because the provision ensures that there is ample opportunity for them to practise and consolidate them.
- Parents and carers speak highly of the staff and feel well informed of their children's progress. Their children are safe at school because the adults are alert to welfare, health and safety issues and comply with the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework.

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	117380
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	449373

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	475
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ali Mansfield
Interim Headteachers	Lisa Hayes and Deirdre Glasgow
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2009
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