

William Harding Combined School

Hazelhurst Drive, Aylesbury, HP21 9TJ

Inspection dates 30 September–1 October 2014

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

- Pupils' attainment and progress declined after the last inspection.
- Having made too little progress in Years 3 to 6, by the end of Year 6 in 2013 attainment was well-below average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils' progress is not yet consistently good in all classes or fast enough to make up for the slower progress they made in the past.
- Teachers do not always set work at the right level of difficulty, especially for the most able pupils who sometimes do work that is too easy for them.
- Pupils write well in English lessons but they do not produce writing of the same quality in all other subjects.
- In some classes, pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to use their number skills to investigate and solve problems in mathematics.
- In the past, governors did not fully appreciate that pupils' progress was not good enough.

The school has the following strengths:

- The new headteacher provides strong leadership in driving improvement.
- Governors, leaders and managers are now working well together in taking effective action to raise pupils' achievement and to improve teaching.
- Standards are now average by the end of Year 6.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Pupils are encouraged to be respectful of others.
- Procedures to ensure that pupils are safe are robust. Pupils feel safe and staff look after them well. They are keen to learn and behave well.
- Children in the early years have a good start and make good progress.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in classes. Most of lessons were seen jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Time was spent analysing pupils' work and the information about pupils' attainment and progress.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, other staff, a representative from the local authority, governors, parents, carers and pupils.
- The inspectors took account of the 98 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, correspondence from parents and carers, and questionnaires completed by 43 members of staff.
- The inspectors examined a range of documents including school policies, safeguarding procedures, self-evaluation and improvement planning.

Inspection team

Derek Watts, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Liz Kissane

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Additional Inspector

Michael Buist

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- William Harding is much larger than the average-sized primary school.
- About three quarters of the pupils are White British. Other pupils have a range of ethnic heritages including Pakistani, African and Caribbean.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional funding for looked after children and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school specialises in providing education for pupils with speech and language needs and disabled pupils from the local area and further afield. These pupils are fully integrated into classes.
- The headteacher took up post in January 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen teaching so that all groups of pupils make at least good progress by:
 - ensuring that all work set is at the right level for pupils, particularly the most able
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills in subjects other than English
 - extending opportunities for pupils to use their number skills to investigate and solve problems in mathematics.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- In just over two terms, the new headteacher has provided strong leadership and shown determination to raise pupils' achievement and improve teaching.
- Leadership roles have been shared out effectively and leaders have enough time to check how well things are going and make improvements in their areas of responsibility.
- All leaders and staff are working well together to raise pupils' achievement and improve teaching after a period of decline in the school's performance. Staff changes and absence, combined with inconsistencies in teaching and assessment, contributed to the decline in pupils' achievement. By the end of summer 2013, Year 6 attainment was at its lowest point because pupils had made inadequate progress from their starting points in Year 2. The underachievement of the past has been arrested and pupils are making better progress. Nevertheless, there is still room for it to be faster to overcome the slow progress made by some pupils in the last few years.
- Pupils' achievement is now checked systematically. Leaders and staff have a clear overview of the school's strengths and areas in need of improvement. Decisive and effective steps have been taken to bring about the necessary changes.
- Improving teaching and the assessment of pupils' attainment has been a key priority. Teaching is effectively checked by senior leaders. Good support and training are provided to improve teachers' skills. Good progress is being made in implementing new assessment arrangements. New teachers, particularly those who have just qualified, receive good guidance and support from senior colleagues.
- Arrangements for teachers' performance management are clear and robust. The targets set to improve teachers' skills are closely linked to pupils' progress and to priorities in the school improvement plan.
- The school has developed an interesting curriculum. Pupils enjoy the subjects and topics provided and the additional activities, such as clubs, sport and educational visits. The range of sporting activities offered is a strength. All pupils have full and equal access to the activities provided.
- Leaders and staff promote and develop pupils' behaviour, safety and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. The school has a positive and welcoming atmosphere. Qualities and values such as courtesy, determination, fairness, respect for others, tolerance and responsibility have a high profile. Pupils at William Harding are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Additional funding is used wisely to provide eligible pupils with extra support, particularly in literacy and numeracy. The funding and support are having a positive impact on these pupils' progress.
- The primary school sports funding is used successfully to promote pupils' physical development. A physical education specialist provides high-quality teaching for pupils and training for staff to enhance their teaching skills. Pupils' participation in athletics, cricket, football and gymnastics has increased.
- The local authority's contact has been limited despite the decline in pupils' achievement and the appointment of a new headteacher. The checking of the school's performance by the local authority has not been robust enough and very little support has been provided. Very recently, a new school improvement adviser was appointed.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body are supportive and have an increasingly clearer view of the school's performance. They are now fully aware of the pressing need to raise pupils' achievement and are being kept informed of progress. They have a good understanding of information about standards related to national figures.
 - The headteacher provides the governors with clear information about standards and the quality of teaching. Governors understand requirements relating to the management of staff performance and the importance of promotion and salary increases reflecting the progress that pupils make.
 - Governors ensure that additional funding is used wisely and check the impact of spending on pupils' progress. They carry out their statutory duties well; they ensure that all safeguarding procedures meet requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.

- Pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 show a keen interest for learning. They focus well on their work and most concentrate well. Good behaviour in lessons supports their learning. In some classes, pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are exemplary. Pupils' behaviour is also positive at playtime, lunchtime and around the school.
- The school's records of behaviour incidents show that behaviour is typically good. Pupils show a clear understanding of bullying and the different forms it might take, such as name calling and cyber bullying. Pupils told an inspector that bullying was rare in the school. They were confident that should it occur, it would be swiftly dealt with by staff.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Pupils are courteous, friendly and supportive of others. They demonstrate positive qualities and values such as commitment, determination, responsibility, respect for others and tolerance. Pupils show a good understanding of different cultures and faiths.
- Pupils are keen to take on positions of responsibility, such as being a house ambassador and serving on the school council. They help others who are less well off than themselves by raising funds for national and international charities.
- Attendance dipped to below average levels in 2013. It is improving because there are more robust systems for checking pupils' attendance. The school works closely with families whose children have low attendance and there are clear systems of rewards for good attendance. Recent data show that attendance is average and rising.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils feel safe at school because they are well looked after by the staff. They know that there are always trusted adults they can turn to if they are worried or upset. They told an inspector, 'Teachers help us and look after us' and 'We are all treated equally.' The school fosters equal opportunity and good relationships well and makes it clear that discrimination is not tolerated.
- Most parents and carers who completed the online survey stated that their child feels safe and is well looked after at school. These positive views reflect the findings of the inspection.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching has not been strong enough over time to promote good progress for all groups of pupils.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils could achieve were not high enough and there were weaknesses in checking pupils' attainment and progress.
- There are times when the work set is too easy, particularly for the most able, and pupils do not make as much progress as they should. Pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to write quality extended pieces in subjects other than English. As a result, pupils' writing is stronger in English than it is in other subjects.
- Teaching has improved and is having a positive impact on pupils' learning and on their progress. Expectations of what pupils can achieve have been raised and pupils are now enjoying and more engaged in the work they do. Teachers now expect the pupils to do their best.
- In mathematics, pupils are acquiring essential knowledge and skills well. However, in some classes they do not carry out investigation and problem solving exercises often enough to understand how they can apply their knowledge and skills.
- Teachers form positive relationships with the pupils and manage their behaviour successfully. Pupils learn well from teachers' clear and informative demonstrations and explanations. They are attentive and join in keenly in lessons, gaining new knowledge and a deeper understanding of ideas.
- Teachers use questions effectively to challenge pupils' thinking, to help them to explore their ideas and to check how well they have understood the work.
- The teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) is improving. Older pupils have good opportunities to apply their reading skills to gather useful information. For example, Year 6 pupils made good progress researching the life of Anne Frank.
- The assessment of pupils' attainment has been strengthened and is now more accurate. Most teachers use this information well to plan their lessons and to set suitably challenging work for different groups of pupils.
- The teaching of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is improving. Teaching assistants are well deployed and make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, particularly in developing

their literacy and numeracy skills.

- The marking of pupils' work is detailed and thorough. Teachers praise good work and provide helpful comments to guide improvement. Pupils know how well they are doing and know what they need to do to improve.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils' attainment and progress in Key Stage 2 declined after the last inspection. By the end of Year 6 in 2013, attainment was well below average in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportions of Year 6 pupils attaining the higher levels were below average in reading and mathematics but closer to average in writing. This year group had made inadequate progress through Key Stage 2.
- A number of factors contributed to the decline in standards. The 2013 year group was a slightly lower-attaining group than groups in previous years. However, as well, their progress was hindered by inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and assessment of their work.
- The Year 6 pupils supported by additional funding in 2013 did less well than the other pupils. They were about 12 months behind in reading and eight months behind in mathematics and writing.
- Leaders and staff have taken positive action to raise progress and the underachievement of the past has been arrested. Pupils are now making better progress but it is not yet consistently good.
- Year 6 attainment in 2014 was much better than in 2013. While national comparative data for 2014 are not available, results are looking average in reading and writing, and above average in mathematics, and the gaps between pupils supported by additional funding and others are likely to be smaller.
- With improved teaching, the proportion of pupils who attained the higher levels by the end of Year 6 increased in 2014. However, there are still occasions in lessons when work is not sufficiently demanding for the most able pupils. When this happens, these pupils do not make as much progress as they could.
- The progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is improving because of more focused support and stronger checking of the teaching of these pupils.
- More recent data supplied by the school show that pupils supported by additional funding are making faster progress than in the past.
- The results of the Year 1 phonics check have been below average in recent years. However, standards in reading are average by the end of Year 2. Last year's Year 6 made good progress in reading through Key Stage 2.
- Pupils' achievement in writing is improving and effective steps are being taken to close the gap between boys' and girls' attainment. Girls have achieved better than the boys in the past. Pupils' writing in English is usually of better quality and detail than it is in other subjects. Inconsistencies in pupils' handwriting and presentation are being systematically tackled.
- Pupils show a clear knowledge and understanding of how to calculate and carry out mathematical operations. There are good examples of pupils applying their number skills to mathematical investigations and problems. However, these skills are not consistently well developed across all classes.

The early years provision

is good

- Most year groups enter the pre-school with knowledge, understanding and skills at levels slightly below those typically expected for their age. Most children are making good progress in the different areas of learning because of good teaching and the interesting activities they do.
- Adults have developed positive relationships with the children. The children feel safe, grow in confidence and relate well to adults and to other children. Their good behaviour supports their learning well.
- Adults successfully promote language development through many of the activities they provide. Children are getting better at speaking and listening because they are encouraged to talk about what they are learning.
- While many children make good progress in number work, the most able do not solve more tricky problems involving large numbers so their progress is not as rapid as it could be.
- Children have good opportunities to be creative. For example, they imaginatively explored the use of different colours when they were painting portraits. They are gaining coordination, control and manipulative skills well through physical activities.
- The early years provision is effectively led and managed. Support staff are well deployed and make a valuable contribution to children's learning. There are clear systems for checking and recording children's

attainment and progress. Staff keep detailed learning journals for each child which include photographs and annotations of what they have learned and the activities they have done. Leaders are aware that some of the resources are old and tired and need to be replaced.

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	110358
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	448740

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	620
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Bateman
Headteacher	Dominic Hughes
Date of previous school inspection	29–30 September 2009
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