

Alumwell Infant School

Primley Avenue, Walsall, West Midlands, WS2 9UP

Inspection dates 8–9 October 2014

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

- The good progress made in the Early Years Foundation Stage is not sustained in Key Stage 1. Teachers do not always plan work that is challenging enough for pupils of different abilities.
- More-able pupils are not supported early and effectively enough in Key Stage 1. As a result, too few pupils reach the higher levels by the end of Year 2, particularly in writing.
- Some activities limit the extent to which pupils can use their reading and writing skills.
- Teachers do not always use marking and feedback effectively. As a result, some pupils are not clear about how to improve their work.
- Leaders do not use the information that the school holds on pupils' achievement to check the progress of different ability groups. They do not identify the precise actions that teachers need to take to ensure that all pupils, particularly more-able pupils, make good progress.
- Governors do not have an accurate view about the achievement of different ability groups. Therefore, although governors ask challenging questions, they are not able to sufficiently check the answers provided by senior leaders.
- A small number of pupils do not demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning.

The school has the following strengths

- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children make good progress from starting points that are often low, particularly in language and literacy skills.
- The school ensures that pupils are safe and well cared for.
- The headteacher and the new deputy headteacher have a clear vision for the school. They have the capacity to lead the necessary improvements.
- The school supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well through lessons and assemblies. Pupils demonstrate respect and tolerance for others.
- The school's work to ensure that disadvantaged pupils catch up with their classmates is successfully closing gaps in achievement in all subjects.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 20 lessons, of which five were jointly observed with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. They also visited classrooms for short periods of time.
- While visiting classrooms, inspectors reviewed work in pupils' mathematics, topic and writing books. Inspectors heard individual pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors. Inspectors also met with groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke with parents and carers as they arrived at school with their children and met with some parents who were attending a meeting in school. There were insufficient responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) for these to be made available to inspectors.
- Questionnaire responses from 23 members of staff were reviewed.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including the school's own information on pupils' achievement, minutes of governing body meetings, attendance information, and documents related to behaviour and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Marilyn Mottram, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Christopher Crouch

Additional Inspector

Rowena Green

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Alumwell Infant School is larger than the average-sized infant school.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through a statement of special educational needs or an education health and care plan is below the national average. There are currently seven pupils with such statements.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for pupil premium is above the national average.
- Early years provision in the Reception classes is full-time.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and increase the proportion of pupils achieving at the higher levels, particularly in writing, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan work that is challenging enough for pupils of different abilities so that all pupils reach their potential
 - always provide the more-able pupils with work that makes them think hard and learn as quickly as they can
 - select activities that allow pupils to fully use their skills in reading and writing
 - provide clear feedback to pupils about how to improve their work
 - promote positive attitudes towards learning.
- Increase the effectiveness of leadership by ensuring that all leaders:
 - use information about pupils' achievement to check the progress of different ability groups and take prompt action to address any weaknesses
 - work together to identify the precise actions teachers need to take to ensure that all pupils, particularly more-able pupils, make good progress
 - provide governors with a concise summary of the difference they are making to achievement of different ability groups so that they can rigorously hold the school to account.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Senior leaders collect detailed information about the progress of individual pupils. However, they do not use the information effectively enough to check the progress of different ability groups. This means that weaknesses in achievement of some groups are missed. As a result, the achievement of some pupils, particularly the most able, has not improved rapidly enough.
- Senior leaders frequently check the quality of teaching by regularly examining pupils' work, observing teaching and providing feedback. Written feedback to teachers does not identify the precise actions that teachers should take to increase the progress of different ability groups. This means that weaknesses in teaching are not addressed quickly enough.
- Subject leaders are not always fully involved in monitoring the quality of teaching in their subjects. As a result, some groups of pupils are not supported early or effectively enough when they move into Key Stage 1. This results in too few pupils reaching higher levels, particularly in writing, by the end of Year 2.
- The headteacher and the new deputy headteacher have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have the capacity to improve the school. They have recently refined the school's priorities. Key changes introduced include a new marking policy and a new behaviour policy. The headteacher and deputy recognise that there is more work to be done to ensure that changes are consistently applied by all staff and have an impact on raising achievement for all groups of pupils.
- There are systems in place to manage the performance of teachers. Leaders recognise that, in the past, targets set for teachers have not been ambitious enough to ensure that pupils of all abilities reach their potential. Teachers are now clear about their accountabilities.
- Leaders have introduced the requirements of the new National Curriculum. They are maintaining the strengths of the 'old' curriculum and ensuring that new requirements are met. Pupils speak about enjoying art, music and dance and particularly enjoy their studies of famous historical people. This reflects the rich curriculum on offer. The school is working closely with Alumwell Junior School to develop a preferred approach to assessment arrangements. This is further strengthening the effective partnership that already exists between the schools.
- The school's ethos, values and curriculum make a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Displays around the school and work in pupils' books show that pupils learn about other cultures and beliefs. The school has links with schools in Hong Kong and India. Pupils exchange emails and postcards with pupils in these schools. They demonstrate respect for others. This reflects the school's commitment to tackling discrimination and preparing pupils for life in modern Britain.
- Sport funding has been used to extend staff's expertise in planning and teaching physical education. Pupils value the additional sessions and lunchtime sports clubs. The headteacher is closely monitoring the impact of these actions, including the impact on pupils' health and well-being.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures are followed rigorously. The school's inclusion team works effectively with neighbouring schools and local authority advisers. All staff are aware of safeguarding issues and know the steps to take if they have any concerns.
- The school works effectively with the local authority. As a result, the school has improved the quality of phonics teaching (the sounds that letters make) and outcomes for pupils have improved. The quality of provision and outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage have also improved as a result of local authority support and guidance. However, during local authority review meetings, there is insufficient joint scrutiny of the progress pupils make from their different starting points.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are committed to the school and have recently undertaken a review of their skills. As a result, they have attended focused training with the local authority and they have a clear action plan for their future development. Documentation shows that governors rightly ask the headteacher for more information about pupils' achievement, particularly the achievement of more-able pupils. Despite this, governors are not rigorous enough in following up the answers they are given. Governors regularly attend safeguarding and child protection training, including safer recruitment. They ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for. Governors have spent pupil premium funding wisely to ensure that it has the required impact on raising eligible pupils' achievement and improving their well being. Statutory duties are met and finances are well managed.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**requires improvement**

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Some pupils do not behave appropriately when they move around the school or in the playground. Occasionally, when they are not directly supervised, some become a little boisterous and run down the corridor or push each other in the playground.
- Pupils demonstrate good attitudes to learning when work is interesting and is set at the right level of challenge. However, when this is not the case, a small number of pupils become disinterested in their work.
- Pupils say that children usually behave well in school, although some use 'bad words sometimes'. They report that a small amount of bullying exists, but they say that 'teachers sort it out'. Pupils understand the behaviour policy and the 'red and yellow card' system. Pupils' comments include, 'The system is fair overall, but some people have to have more than one red card before they start to make the right choice'.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Documentation is well maintained and used to inform work with staff, families and pupils. Issues relating to e-safety are taught through various lessons. Pupils demonstrate a good awareness of how to avoid risks when working online. Parents and carers agree that their children feel safe in school. They know that discrimination is not tolerated.
- Leaders have worked hard to improve attendance. School records show that the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school has reduced and that attendance is now close to the national average.

The quality of teaching**requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching is too variable to enable pupils to make consistently good progress. Work in pupils' books shows that, in some classes, all pupils are set the same task and activities are not quickly changed or adapted when pupils show that they can easily cope with the task set. For example, pupils frequently write sentences for teachers but the expectations for success are not clear. Therefore, pupils who complete their writing task easily are not challenged to extend their skills or sequence several sentences. Less confident writers are not clear about what they need to do to improve their work. This limits progress.
- At times the reading and writing activities set by teachers place a limit on the quality and quantity of work that pupils can produce, or the amount of progress that they can make within a lesson. For example, pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their own ideas for writing or to make choices about how to plan and present their writing. Pupils' reading books are sometimes too easy and pupils are not encouraged to discuss their reading enough or challenged to apply their skills more widely in other subjects. This hinders progress in reading and writing and prevents pupils from working at more challenging levels.
- Teachers' marking and feedback to pupils are not consistently good across the school. Not all teachers provide clear enough guidance for pupils about how to improve their work. They do not always make sure that pupils follow-up the guidance they receive by applying it to their work. Basic errors in pupils' handwriting and letter formation are sometimes left unaddressed over a long period of time. This slows pupils' progress in writing.
- Work in pupils' mathematics books shows that some teachers do not have consistently high expectations. In some classes, pupils spend too long practising number skills. They are not provided with enough opportunities to deepen their knowledge and understanding by using and applying their skills to more challenging problems. This does not equip pupils to work at higher levels.
- Pupils make good progress when teachers select activities that allow them to fully use their knowledge and understanding and apply their skills effectively. For example, Year 2 pupils used sophisticated vocabulary to write poetry following a visit to Tamworth Castle. Some pupils used 'word mats' to support their spelling and extend their vocabulary. Other pupils produced information leaflets to persuade other children to visit the castle. Pupils discussed their writing with teachers and classmates. They were clear about how to improve their work. As a result, all pupils made good progress. They demonstrated positive attitudes to their work and were proud to read their writing to others.
- Adults who support teachers are skilful. They make sure that pupils who needs extra support, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, gain confidence and are able to achieve well.

The achievement of pupils**requires improvement**

- Achievement requires improvement because rates of progress, particularly in writing, vary across different classes and for different ability groups in Key Stage 1. Work in pupils' books show that too few pupils make better-than-expected progress from their different starting points, particularly in writing.
- The most-able pupils do not always make good progress because they are not given enough opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills fully. Fewer pupils reach the higher levels in all subjects at the end of Year 2, but particularly in writing.
- For the last three years, the proportion of pupils reaching the standards expected at the end of Year 2 has been just below the national average in reading and writing and broadly in line with national average in mathematics. Pupils who speak English as an additional language meet the standards expected for their age in all subjects.
- In the reading check set for Year 1 pupils in 2013, the school achieved results below those found nationally. The school responded to this with urgency. Staff training has resulted in more effective teaching of phonics. School records show that more pupils are now working at the standards expected for their age in this important aspect of their learning.
- Pupil premium funding is used wisely to provide additional teaching staff and resources. In 2013, at the end of Year 2, eligible pupils were on average just over one term behind other pupils in reading and writing and one term behind other pupils in mathematics. When compared with other pupils nationally the gap was under one term in writing and mathematics and one term in reading. The school's records show that this gap has narrowed further in 2014. For pupils currently in the school, the gap between the attainment of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding and others is closing rapidly.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. This is because there are robust systems in place for identifying pupils' particular needs and appropriate support is put in place to make sure that pupils achieve well. Parents are very positive about the care and support provided for their children. This reflects the school's commitment to providing equal opportunities for all pupils.

The early years provision**is good**

- Children join Reception with skills that are below those expected for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy skills. Children achieve well because staff set interesting and challenging activities that engage children of all abilities and encourage them to sustain their learning. Adults use questioning effectively to encourage children to explain their thinking and ideas. As a result, children make at least good progress and some make outstanding progress. With support from the local authority, leaders have introduced an improved assessment system to check children's learning and development from their different starting points in Reception. Staff work effectively with local nurseries to ensure smooth transition into school. Information about each child's learning and development is checked and discussed thoroughly. Parents and carers value the care shown towards their children by the staff.
- Staff observe how well children are learning and are rigorous in recording assessments and observations which are used to plan further activities. Staff help children to understand how they can improve their own learning. This promotes positive attitudes to learning.
- Systems to support transition from Reception into Year 1 are not as robust. As a result, some children do not maintain this rapid rate of progress.

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	104143
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	449279

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community School
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	271
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms B Langley
Headteacher	Mrs Donna Harper
Date of previous school inspection	11–12 November 2010
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