

Aston Clinton School

Twitchell Lane, Aston Clinton, Aylesbury, HP22 5JJ

Inspection dates 5–6 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
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 good school

- The school is very well led by the headteacher. With the support of governors and other leaders, she has successfully tackled a dip in standards by improving teaching and ensuring all groups of pupils achieve well.
- Governors are highly skilled and fully involved with the school. They know its strengths and exactly what it needs to do to improve further.
- Pupils benefit from a rich curriculum which interests them and successfully promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils have excellent relationships with their teachers. They enjoy learning, behave well and try hard.
- The overwhelming majority of parents are confident that their children are safe and well looked after.
- Teachers know their pupils well. They skilfully plan activities in lessons that engage, challenge and motivate all groups of pupils.
- Good provision in the early years means that children progress well, with most reaching a good level of development.
- Pupils in each year group are making good progress. Most pupils in Year 6 are already working at or above the levels expected by the end of the year.
- Highly effective provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs means they make good and often exceptional progress from their starting points.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of teaching is not yet outstanding. In particular, boys do not do as well as girls in writing, particularly with regard to spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to practise and improve their writing skills outside literacy lessons.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 29 lessons. Some observations were shared with the headteacher. Inspectors also made a number of other short visits to classrooms.
- Inspectors heard pupils read and looked at samples of their work.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including the school improvement plan and records of pupils' behaviour, safety and attendance. They also looked at information on individual pupils' progress, anonymised records of teachers' performance, and records of meetings of the governing body.
- Inspectors met with pupils and teachers and spoke to parents. They also spoke to six members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- The views of parents were obtained through the 113 responses to the online Parent View survey and from letters received from individual parents. Written comments from 21 members of staff were also considered.

Inspection team

Rob Crompton, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Roger Easthope

Additional Inspector

James Waite

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school. Most pupils are White British, with around a tenth from a range of minority ethnic groups. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for children who are in the care of the local authority or known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is broadly average.
- Children in the early years attend two, full-time Reception classes.
- There is additionally resourced provision for pupils with severe speech, language and communication difficulties, with 10 places available. At the time of the inspection, seven pupils were supported by this unit.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders need to ensure that the quality of teaching is outstanding, in order to accelerate the progress boys make in writing by:
 - providing more opportunities for boys to practise and improve their writing skills across the curriculum
 - ensuring that the recently introduced programme for systematically teaching spelling, grammar, punctuation and handwriting becomes fully embedded.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The ethos of the school is purposeful. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and there is a collective determination that they should do as well as they can. Pupils know that good behaviour is required and that they should make every effort to succeed. The success of school leaders in raising standards indicates a strong capacity for further improvement.
- An innovative approach to subject leadership, where small teams of teachers oversee three or four subjects, works well. They share ideas about the curriculum and teaching methods. For example, after much research and discussion, a new assessment system, taking account of the revised National Curriculum, was about to be implemented at the time of the inspection. When key staff move on, the team approach enables a seamless transition and helps to ensure continuity.
- Leaders keep a sharp eye on the quality of teaching, looking particularly at how successfully teachers ensure their pupils make good progress. They observe lessons, analyse assessment information and look at pupils' workbooks to check that individuals or groups are not falling behind. Leaders are well aware of the different performance of boys and girls in writing, for example. They are providing further training for teachers and additional resources.
- The school is committed to ensuring equal opportunities and has a growing reputation for its inclusive approach. Good relations are successfully promoted. For example, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, including those attached to the speech, language and communication unit, are fully integrated into school life.
- Older pupils are split into ability sets for mathematics. This challenges the most able pupils and provides opportunities for the least able to meet their full potential.
- The pupil premium is used effectively to support disadvantaged pupils. For example, those with emotional and behavioural needs are helped by the family support coordinator and pupils academic needs are supported by the recently appointed learning mentor.
- The primary sport and physical education funding is spent wisely. Specialist coaches are employed to both lead clubs and to pass on their expertise to school staff. Pupils take advantage of the wider options available. Pupils in Years 1 to 3 have at least four clubs to choose from; those in Years 4 to 6 have the choice of at least nine. The school's original target of a 45% participation rate in sports clubs has been exceeded.
- Pupils benefit from a rich curriculum that supports their academic progress and personal development. Work in pupils' books shows that they learn and achieve well across the full range of subjects, including art and design, geography, science and computing. A strong emphasis on art, music and sport enhances their experiences. For example, all pupils in Year 3 learn an instrument.
- Through activities such as delving into Britain's history, lessons in philosophy, and taking part in elections for the school council, pupils gain an understanding of British values. They are taught to be tolerant and respectful and to challenge discrimination, and they leave the school well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school works very well with the local authority which has supported school improvements through a review of teaching and specialist advice.
- The school takes care to ensure that it has effective arrangements for safeguarding pupils and children in the early years. All statutory requirements in this respect are met. For example, meticulous attention is given to checking the suitability of all employees.
- Leadership and management are not yet outstanding because the quality of teaching has not yet secured outstanding progress in writing, particularly for boys.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors have a good grasp of their roles and responsibilities. They are adept at analysing and interpreting assessment data. This enables them to check pupils' progress and ask insightful questions. They support the headteacher and offer challenge where they feel that the school needs to improve. Governors have specific responsibilities and visit the school regularly to gain first-hand information. They keep a close eye on the management of teachers' performance, make sure that teachers are accountable for their pupils' progress and ensure effective teaching is recognised when salaries are reviewed. Together with the headteacher, governors communicate their aspirations for the school, to staff and the wider community. They manage the finances well and seek assurance that additional funding, for example for disadvantaged pupils and for sports, is used well. Governors routinely evaluate their own effectiveness.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning and keen to please. Their prompt responses, mature approach to working in groups and pairs, and ability to work independently enhance their learning and contribute to their good progress. Occasionally, pupils' engagement flags when lesson introductions are overlong.
- Excellent relationships between staff and pupils underpin the positive attitudes seen in all lessons. Pupils were enthusiastic about lessons in philosophy, where they discuss 'big juicy questions'. They show respect for others and are helpful and polite to visitors, staff and to their classmates.
- Rewards and sanctions are consistent and understood by all staff. Pupils say that the system of rewards, including house points and the headteacher's award, helps them try hard to do better. Parents are highly positive about behaviour.
- Effective pastoral care features close links with external agencies and sensitive support for pupils at risk of falling behind. Consequently, they can fully participate and progress as well as their classmates.
- Pupils' levels of attendance are consistently above average and persistent absence is comparatively low.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils say that they feel entirely safe and parents are confident that their children are looked after well.
- Bullying is not considered to be an issue by pupils. Among their comments were: 'We learn about bullying a lot', 'We're all friends' and 'It's not something we have to worry about'.
- Pupils are well aware of the need to be cautious when using modern communication technology. They are alert to cyber-bullying and trolling, for example, and understand the need to keep personal information secure.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in the community and at school, and how to avoid potential hazards. For example, they discussed what they had learned about road safety during a recent 'Be Bright Day'.
- Parents responding to Parent View were overwhelmingly positive about the way the school ensures their children's safety. This was endorsed by all of those spoken to during the inspection.

The quality of teaching is good

- Pupils show very positive, mature attitudes and sustain their concentration because they pick up teachers' enthusiasm for learning and rise to the challenges they are set. For example, when asked, 'What is the biggest remainder when dividing by four?' pupils in Year 3 struggled at first, but there were soon cries of 'I've got it!' when one offered an accurate explanation.
- Good learning in literacy and numeracy is promoted successfully. Prompted by teachers, pupils try their best, with most making good efforts to present their work neatly, especially in mathematics.
- Teachers use questioning skilfully to keep pupils on their toes and sustain their interest and engagement. They set work that builds on pupils' starting points so they do not cover old ground or find the work too demanding. Setting for mathematics in the older classes works well, allowing the most able pupils to be stretched and the less confident to be supported effectively.
- Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to practise, consolidate and extend their numeracy skills in subjects such as science and geography where they measure and construct graphs. There are not enough opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills across the curriculum and this is a priority in the school's development planning.
- Marking provides pupils with very useful pointers for improvement. Teachers often elicit pupils' ideas about 'what makes good work'. This gives pupils something specific to aim for and helps them to see how to improve. Pupils say that marking one another's work is helpful. One explained, 'Marking someone else's work makes you think again about your own.'
- Pupils make good efforts to complete homework tasks. Teachers vary these on alternate weeks, setting revision work, such as spellings and calculations one week and open-ended investigative work the next. This gives pupils, especially the most able pupils, opportunities to study topics in depth and extend their knowledge and understanding.
- Teaching assistants are highly committed to their roles and work closely with teachers to provide skilled support for all groups of pupils.

The achievement of pupils **is good**

- Achievement is not yet outstanding because, although over time, pupils' attainment by the end of Year 6 has been above average, there was a dip last year. This was mainly due to the characteristics of the year group, which included a large proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. The school's records indicate that the quality of teaching this cohort experienced as they moved through the school was not consistently good enough.
- Current pupils are making good progress and the standard of their work in Years 2 and 6 is above average. The majority of the Year 6 pupils are working at the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics. In line with recent trends, girls are doing better than boys in writing. That said, almost half the boys are working at above the levels expected.
- Due to the systematic teaching of phonics (the sounds letters make), pupils in Year 1 become increasingly confident in reading unfamiliar words, reaching above average levels in the phonic skills check.
- Pupils continue to make good progress in reading through the school. Most become very proficient readers. When discussing their reading preferences and the difference between books and films, a group of Year 6 pupils showed considerable insights. 'I prefer reading', said one, 'because you can imagine your own characters.' Another commented, 'A film can say something quickly that takes a long time to write.'
- Although usually above average, pupils' attainment in writing is typically below that in reading. This is especially true of boys. The school is addressing this by broadening the range of topics designed to appeal to boys. A systematic programme for teaching spelling, punctuation and grammar has been introduced and this is bearing fruit. There is a renewed emphasis on handwriting. School leaders acknowledge that these initiatives are not yet fully embedded and they are sustaining the impetus on improving boys' writing.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics and, by Year 6, confidently tackle a wide range of mathematical activities, including converting fractions to decimals and exploring the relationship between area and perimeter. Using a systematic approach to problem solving, pupils created algebraic expressions, such as $(Ax^2)+2=P$.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs build very well on their starting points. They benefit from the school's highly effective approach to supporting children and their families. The additional specialist resource for speech, language and communication is very successful. For example, pupils who start school with very little vocabulary and severe speech problems typically make rapid progress.
- The gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils varies from year to year. However, in all year groups, these pupils are progressing at similar rates as other pupils. In 2014, the disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 were around a year behind their peers. Most of these pupils had special educational needs.
- The most able pupils benefit from demanding work and challenging homework. Many are adept at using multiplication tables to calculate quickly and show considerable flair in writing. One Year 6 pupil wrote, 'The sirens pierced the darkness, shrill as a birdsong; the sound signalled a new age for Pompeii.' His classmate's response was appropriate: 'It drags me in like a fishing net. It's almost as good a Percy Jackson!'

The early years provision **is good**

- When children enter the early years, their levels of skill and knowledge are usually below typical starting points, particularly in communication and language. Children make good progress and, by the end of the Reception Year, their skills match and in some cases exceed those typical for their age. They are well prepared to start Year 1.
- Adults provide a calm and stimulating environment in which children feel very secure and ready for learning. They behave well and are happy to play and make new friends. Children enjoy working, both indoors and outdoors, on their own and with adults. They soon learn to take turns. Staff focus clearly on promoting oral skills ready for reading and writing, and on developing children's knowledge of numbers.
- Teaching is good. Adults assess children accurately when they start and quickly identify the skills they need to learn. Usually, there is a buzz of activity as children choose activities that are well planned to support their development, through talk, discussion and play. During one 'free flow' session, for example, children were making paper hats, threading bobbins, and quietly looking at picture books, while others announced, 'The show is about to begin!' from behind the puppet theatre. Occasionally, children become over excited and noise levels rise. Adults are sometimes too slow in bringing the atmosphere back to normal.
- The school works very effectively with parents so that children feel safe. Staff keep electronic records of children's progress, including photographs of key moments, providing comprehensive and easily accessible information for parents.
- Good quality resources both indoors and outdoors contribute to children's progress across all areas of

learning.

- The recently appointed early years leader has made a good start. She has a good understanding of what has been achieved so far and what there is still to do.

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	110332
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	449741

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	393
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brett Daddow
Headteacher	Helen Shepherd
Date of previous school inspection	29–30 September 2009
Telephone number	01296630276
Fax number	01296632413
Email address	head@astonclinton.bucks.sch.uk

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