

R A Butler Infant School

South Road, Saffron Walden, CB11 3DG

Inspection dates 29–30 April 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
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 recently appointed headteacher has tackled the issues highlighted in the previous inspection rigorously. She has developed a strong and effective senior leadership team. Senior leaders have brought about significant improvements in both the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.
- The reorganised and effective governing body provides a good balance of support and challenge to school leaders.
- Teaching is typically good and ensures that pupils make good progress in the great majority of the lesson activities they are given.
- Teachers have high expectations. They manage their classes well and provide activities that engage pupils' interest.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs receive very effective extra help. They make good progress in their learning.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well. Pupils cooperate well with one another and respect those who have different opinions to their own. Pupils develop a good understanding of life in modern Britain.
- Pupils conduct themselves well, and are courteous and friendly towards others. They work hard and listen to their teachers.
- Pupils are well cared for and safe. They feel valued and have great confidence in their teachers. Parents are very happy with the way the school teaches and looks after their children.
- The well-structured provision in the early years is helping children to make good progress in all areas of learning. Children settle in quickly and learn how to get along with others and do things for themselves. They gain confidence and are well prepared to start Year 1.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Although pupils achieve well overall, progress sometimes slows for a few pupils when they do not fully understand the work or when it is too easy for them.
- Occasionally, teachers do not check carefully enough that all pupils are making good progress in the activities they are working on.
- Teachers do not always encourage pupils to think about why the method they have used to complete a calculation has been successful. Consequently, pupils are not always able to spot their mistakes or the reasons for them, for example, when subtracting numbers.
- A few pupils are not able to use technical terms, such as 'sum' and 'difference' to explain their thinking in mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils at work in all year groups and in different subjects. On some occasions, they were accompanied by leaders. They looked at pupils' written work in all years and checked the records of children's learning in the early years.
- The inspection team held meetings with the headteacher, other school leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and six other governors. Inspectors spoke to a consultant who had been engaged by the academy trust to work as the school's improvement partner.
- Inspectors spoke to a group of pupils and, informally, with other pupils in lessons and around the school. An inspector listened to pupils reading and spoke to them about their reading habits.
- Inspectors examined several school documents. These included the school's evaluation of its performance and its improvement plan, notes of governors' meetings, information about pupils' progress and attainment, evidence about the quality of teaching, and records relating to behaviour, safeguarding and attendance.
- Inspectors took account of the 82 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. They also took note of the views expressed informally by parents as they arrived at school and in two letters. The team analysed 16 questionnaires returned by staff.

Inspection team

James McVeigh, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Lindsay Hanger

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school has three full-time Reception classes and five other classes. There are two classes for each of Years 1 and 2, and one class containing a combination of pupils in Years 1 and 2. It is slightly smaller than the average-sized school.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (extra government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or children who are looked after by the local authority) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- There is a breakfast and after-school club, run by an external provider, which is inspected separately.
- The school became an academy in 2010 and shares a site with another academy, the R A Butler Junior School, with which it is federated. The executive headteacher, who has been in post since September 2013, leads both academies.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring teachers always:
 - check that all pupils understand what they have been asked to do
 - set activities that are at the right level of difficulty for pupils so that they can make good progress.
- Raise pupils' achievement in mathematics by ensuring all pupils:
 - learn how to use technical vocabulary accurately to explain their thinking in mathematics
 - think carefully about which method to use when making calculations, and why one method is better than another.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Since her appointment, and following a period of instability in the school's leadership, the executive headteacher has carefully and successfully guided the school through a period of considerable change. She has now established a very effective team of leaders. Governors and school leaders have a shared ambition to develop the school into an outstanding place of learning in which all pupils can thrive. The leadership team has made excellent progress in improving the quality of teaching and pupils' attainment, but leaders and governors appreciate there is still much to do.
- School leaders have created an inclusive, happy and purposeful school, where pupils behave well, work purposefully in lessons and consequently achieve well. Leaders do not tolerate discrimination and ensure all children have equally good opportunities to succeed. For example, disadvantaged pupils benefit from their opportunities to join a lunchtime club and they have full access to all school trips.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well, which contributes considerably to the school's ethos. The school's values, such as trust, respect and fairness, are encapsulated in the acronym 'terrific'. This appears in all rooms and is a term which pupils are thoroughly familiar with and can readily explain to visitors. Pupils are given many opportunities to share their ideas. They listen carefully to others and value their opinions. They learn about different cultures and religions and celebrate a range of religious festivals. The school plans to link with an inner city school to promote cultural awareness further. Pupils are being very well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders use a wide range of evidence, gathered regularly, to support their accurate evaluation of teaching quality and to identify any underperformance. They have brought marked improvements to teaching as a result. Teachers benefit from leaders' clear, helpful feedback and appropriate support where necessary. This includes opportunities to visit other schools, as well as high quality training that has been carefully selected from the programmes offered by an alliance of local schools. The school itself now runs a 'Teaching Excellence' in conjunction with the alliance. As a consequence, teaching continues to improve rapidly.
- Leaders regularly check on the school's performance and have an accurate picture of its strengths and of the areas that need to be improved further. They have identified priorities for moving the school forward and have agreed carefully planned actions, which they are successfully implementing.
- Subject and phase leaders, including those in the early years, lead their areas of responsibility effectively. They are given good support so that they can improve their leadership skills. They are held accountable for improvements in their subject areas, including in the quality of teaching and in pupils' progress. Pupils are making better progress as a result. For example, subject leaders have trained teachers and teaching assistants in the delivery of phonics (the sounds letters make), which has notably sharpened pupils' skills in the use of phonics and improved their literacy.
- Staff have developed an exciting and engaging range of topics, based on the new national curriculum, linking subjects through popular stories in each year group to help pupils see the relevance of their learning. Pupils have frequent opportunities to write at length on topics that interest them, and the quality of writing in the school is improving as a consequence.
- The school gives the highest possible priority to keeping pupils safe. School leaders have been well trained and are very vigilant in identifying any concerns and in ensuring external support agencies respond in a timely manner when necessary. Safeguarding policies meet statutory requirements. All staff fully understand agreed procedures and implement them carefully. Governors regularly check that safeguarding policies are effective.
- The R A Butler Academy (incorporating the infant and junior schools) ensures the school uses its funds effectively for the benefit of all pupils. The pupil premium is used to provide outstanding support for eligible pupils, for example, through one-to-one tuition, music lessons and access to a learning mentor and counsellor. Consequently, these pupils are quickly catching up with their classmates.

- The primary sport funding is being used effectively to engage a specialist sports teacher, improve teachers' coaching skills, introduce new sports, competitions and sports clubs,; and introduce sporting events for families. More pupils are now engaged in more physical activity with the consequent benefit to their overall health.
- Parents are very pleased with the way the school looks after their children. As a typical comment from parents exemplifies, 'The school is fantastic. My child is making really good progress and grows in confidence each day'. Parents feel closely involved in the life of the school. They say that teachers are approachable and communication is good. Parents have regular opportunities to see their children's work and discuss their progress with teachers. The school gives them good support so that they are able to help their children at home.
- The school makes good use of an experienced and skilled school improvement partner to provide an external, critical view of its performance and effective support for teachers and leaders. This has provided good support for the school and helped it to improve both teaching and achievement.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have ensured that their own training is up to date, and the governing body has the skills needed to carry out its roles and responsibilities fully. Governors work closely with the new leadership team and provide very effective strategic direction for the school.
 - The governing body responded quickly to the previous inspection recommendations and, following a review of governance, reorganised itself into a leaner and more effective body. This has enabled governors to collect and analyse school performance information and challenge the school to do better.
 - Governors have assiduously gathered a wide range of evidence through focused visits, which include talking to teachers and pupils, and reports from the headteacher and other school leaders. They know about the quality of teaching and pupils' attainment and progress and how they have improved. This ensures their challenging questions to school leaders are focused on areas where improvement is needed.
 - Governors have a clear understanding of how teachers' performance is managed. They make sure that all pay awards for teachers are justified and that they are linked to pupils' progress. Governors ensure any underperformance is tackled immediately. They check that the school uses the pupil premium effectively to promote more rapid progress for disadvantaged pupils. Governors work closely with the schools improvement partner to set challenging targets for the headteacher.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are kind to one another and considerate of each other's needs. From the moment they enter Reception, they learn to move around the school sensibly and play happily together at playtimes. Staff, parents and pupils agree that pupils conduct themselves well.
- Pupils are eager to learn and like coming to school. They are keen to earn merit certificates and enjoy voting for classmates who have demonstrated one of the 'terrific' values. Pupils report there is little name-calling. Attendance has been maintained at above average levels since the last inspection.
- In lessons, pupils listen to their teachers and respond to instructions promptly. Occasionally, when work is too easy or too difficult, a few pupils become distracted. At these times, their progress slows slightly.
- There have been no serious incidents of bullying or racism in recent years and there have been no exclusions. Staff maintain full records of minor misdemeanours, which are at a low level.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say they feel safe and well cared for at school and parents agree. Pupils readily state that they could turn to their teachers if they ever felt upset. They are taught how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations, for example, when crossing the road or using the internet.

- Pupils know about the different forms of bullying and know that they should tell a teacher if they see or experience bullying. They are confident that teachers would sort out any problems quickly and fairly.
- School leaders ensure that all health and safety procedures are reviewed regularly and followed closely. For example, the school rehearses its procedures for the emergency evacuation of the school buildings at least termly, and areas where pupils work or play are well supervised. Absences are followed up promptly.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection, and it is now typically good in all areas of the school, including in the early years. Teachers have responded well to leaders' advice and have taken full advantage of the training opportunities provided to improve their practice. They are consequently able to ensure that pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics as they move through the school.
- Teachers have established good relationships with pupils and manage their classes well. Classrooms are well organised and contain helpful displays of pupils' recent learning. They exhibit a calm atmosphere in which pupils are able to work purposefully at all times. Teaching assistants are well-trained and deployed carefully. They provide good support to individual pupils so that they keep up with their classmates.
- School leaders ensure that high quality support and individual tuition are provided for disadvantaged pupils, as well as for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. This enables them to take a full part in all activities and achieve well. Both groups of pupils are making better than expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the school.
- Teachers mark pupils' written work regularly in all subjects. They state what pupils have done well and indicate where pupils have made mistakes. Teachers give clear guidance on how pupils can improve their work, which helps pupils to make more rapid progress.
- Teachers provide activities to support learning that are usually interesting and engage pupils. They encourage pupils to share their ideas with one another and often question pupils skilfully so they have to think hard. Consequently, pupils have to reflect on their work and explain their answers.
- Phonics is taught well. Teachers and teaching assistants demonstrate how to make the sounds accurately and how to blend them correctly to pronounce words. This good phonics teaching helps pupils to read quickly. Teachers have successfully raised the profile of reading in school. The headteacher recently challenged staff to make reading areas more exciting places. As a result, the reading corners in classrooms are attractively decorated and now contain high quality books. Reading competitions and regular visits to the library further encourage pupils to read. Pupils are reading regularly with enjoyment, which has a great impact on their reading ability.
- The teaching of writing, a weaker area at the previous inspection, is now highly effective. Pupils are given good opportunities to write in a range of styles. Teachers coax ideas and increasingly complex vocabulary and sentence structure from pupils, preparing them well for writing. Their detailed and constructive marking guides pupils carefully to raise the quality of their written work further.
- As a consequence of improved teaching, pupils are making better progress in mathematics and reaching higher standards. There is a strong focus on developing number skills and learning the correct method for calculations. However, there is less emphasis on improving pupils' mathematical vocabulary and their conceptual understanding. A few pupils are not always sure why the calculation method they have used works, such as when subtracting numbers to find the difference. Occasionally, they use mathematical terminology inaccurately, and this means they find it more difficult to spot their mistakes and explain their thinking.
- Teachers assess pupils' work regularly to plan further learning opportunities and to identify any pupils in danger of slipping behind. Teachers work with colleagues across a number of other local schools to ensure their assessments are accurate. The local authority has also checked that teachers' assessments are accurate.

- Teachers usually set work at the right level of challenge. However, occasionally they do not check quickly enough how well pupils are getting on with an activity. Consequently, pupils either spend too long on a skill they have mastered or struggle on a task they do not fully understand. This restricts their progress.

The achievement of pupils is good

- The quality of work seen by inspectors in pupils' books and the school's own records of their achievement, indicate that pupils in Year 2 are making good progress in reading and, particularly, in writing. Their progress in mathematics, however, is a little weaker than in the other two subjects. This is partly because the work set is not always at the right level and also because they do not always spot their mistakes quickly enough. Overall, Year 2 pupils are on track to achieve higher standards than last year in all three subjects and reach at least the national average in each case. The progress of pupils in other year groups across the school is also improving.
- In 2014, Year 2 pupils' attainment in reading was above average; it was average in mathematics and writing. In writing, a smaller proportion of pupils attained the higher levels than average.
- Results in the 2014 national phonics check of Year 1 pupils were just below average. Currently, pupils are making good progress in phonics and are learning to read well. They are using their phonic skills to read new words and to help them with their spelling. Parents are encouraged to listen to their children reading and pupils have good opportunities to read to adults at school.
- Through early identification of their needs and well-focused additional support, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, are in most cases, making good progress, and are sometimes progressing faster than their classmates.
- The effective extra support provided for disadvantaged pupils is ensuring that they, too, make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The school makes good use of the pupil premium to provide one-to-one tuition from trained staff. The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates is closing rapidly.
- The work teachers set for the most-able pupils is generally challenging and pushes them to reach higher standards. Overall, their achievement is good. Although fewer than average pupils gained the higher Level 3 in writing in 2014, currently, the most-able pupils in the school are making good progress in all subjects. For example, in Year 2, they were given the difficult task of editing a deliberately miswritten paragraph with hard-to-spot punctuation, grammar and spelling mistakes. Pupils worked briskly to identify and correct errors and made good progress. Data held by the school suggests that the proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels at the end of this year is on track to rise in reading, writing and mathematics.

The early years provision is good

- School leaders are passionate about creating opportunities for children to learn. They have made sure that provision has improved rapidly in the early years since the previous inspection. Teaching is now of high quality. The restructuring of the teaching assistant support group, so that only those with the appropriate qualifications as early years practitioners are employed by the school. This has significantly enhanced provision. The school prepares children very well for the learning they will encounter in Year 1.
- The department is very well led and managed. Transition arrangements to settle children into Reception and enable them to move confidently into Year 1 are highly effective. Staff look after children well and make sure they are kept safe. Children quickly become self-confident in the secure and welcoming environment that exists throughout the early years, and learn to do things for themselves. They listen attentively to their teachers and behave well.
- Children begin Reception with skill levels that are broadly typical for their age. They make good progress in all areas of learning. The proportion reaching a good level of development has increased and, in 2014, was average. The school's records and work seen show that a much greater proportion is on track to

reach a similarly good level by the end of the year. Children, including those who are in receipt of the pupil premium, make good progress in all areas of learning.

- Teaching meets the needs of all groups of children well. All activities, both inside and outside, are carefully planned and provide rich experiences in all areas of learning. Extension activities, which children choose for themselves, are carefully linked to activities led by adults and fully develop children's understanding of the topic they are learning about.
- Children quickly develop a good understanding of number and can carry out simple calculations, for example, in working out how many children have a birthday in the same month.
- Staff have been well trained in how to teach phonics and do so effectively. Adults skilfully show children how to produce the correct sounds for the letters and continuously monitor their responses. Teachers quickly correct mistakes so that children rapidly develop their phonic skills and build their confidence and accuracy in speaking. They quickly gain a strong knowledge of the phonic sounds and link them accurately to letters. This develops their skills in early reading and writing well.
- Adults regularly observe and record the steps in each child's development. Their planning builds on earlier learning and leads to activities that promote good progress. Parents contribute their own observations of children's development and are encouraged to engage with their child's learning.
- The regular use of activities in the local woodland enhances children's outdoor experiences and adds to their learning. Children learn enthusiastically about the natural world. In one session, children found seedlings of trees and were taught how to handle and plant them. The teacher cleverly linked a child's complaint, 'I don't have enough room', to the need to plant seeds with enough space for each to grow. Children talked excitedly about their activities and collaborated very well. The teacher's strong subject knowledge, and the way she encouraged children to use correct vocabulary, helped them to make outstanding progress in the development of their understanding of the world and of their speaking skills.

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	136325
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	462118

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	239
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Hughes
Headteacher	Linda Chesworth (Executive Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	09 May 2013
Telephone number	01799 523652
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