

The Acorns Primary and Nursery School

Pooltown Road, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 7ED

Inspection dates 16–17 June 2015

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

- Teaching is not yet consistently good across the school. In some classes assessment information, including that gained from marking, is not always used effectively enough to provide an appropriate level of challenge or support for groups of differing ability.
- Not enough pupils make more than the progress expected of them from their starting points in English and mathematics.
- The curriculum in Year 1 does not meet the needs of all pupils adequately; some pupils have not achieved the skills they need and therefore find tasks difficult and this slows their progress.
- Middle leaders are not sufficiently involved in evaluating the progress pupils make in their subjects, nor in ensuring that teaching and learning in their subject areas improve.
- Plans for improvement do not include precise detail about what needs to be done and how their impact can be measured in terms of outcomes for pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- Children in the early years provision make good progress as a result of good teaching and the effective use of on-going assessment to plan their next steps in learning.
- Pupils with disabilities and special educational needs and those pupils in the resourced provision make good progress as a result of the extra support they receive, which is carefully tailored to meet their needs.
- All pupils are courteous and polite and get on well together. Pupils feel safe in school and play an active part in decision-making.
- Attainment and progress in reading are improving as a result of recent changes to the curriculum and teaching.
- The senior leadership team has an accurate view of the school's performance and provides clear guidance about what needs to be improved further.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed lessons and other learning activities, such as individual or small-group intervention work, including some led by teaching assistants. Most of these observations were carried out jointly with the executive headteacher, the executive deputy headteacher or the executive assistant headteacher.
- Inspectors observed assemblies and listened to pupils read. Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body, and members of staff. Inspectors held discussions with two groups of pupils and other pupils in their classes and around the school and with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work with senior leaders and read a range of documents. These included documents about the school's strategies to enable leaders to gain an accurate view of its performance, school improvement plans, data about pupils' current progress, policies and records on safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- The inspectors observed the school's work, including the resourced provision, and took account of 43 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and 44 responses to a questionnaire completed by members of staff.

Inspection team

Judith Tolley, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Steve Rigby	Additional Inspector
Doreen Davenport	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized primary school. Most pupils are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is well above average. (The pupil premium is additional government funding to support those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.)
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum standards for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school has resourced provision for up to seven pupils with complex needs. The school runs a breakfast and after-school club each day.
- Children attend the Nursery on a part-time basis and Reception on a full-time basis.
- There is a federation arrangement in place between the Acorns and Whitley Village Primary School, a small school in Lower Whitley, near Warrington. It involves a shared leadership arrangement in which the senior leadership team spends one day each week at the partner school.
- Since the last inspection there have been significant changes of staff. The deputy headteacher has been in post since January 2015.
- The school holds awards in its provision for sports, arts, eco-school and inclusion.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that it is consistently good or better and therefore raise attainment and increase the rate of progress pupils make in mathematics, reading and writing, by:
 - ensuring that all teachers use assessment information, including that gained from marking, to provide an appropriate level of challenge and support for all pupils in lessons
 - making sure that marking always gives pupils precise guidance about how to improve their work and that they are given the time and opportunity to respond.
- Ensure that the curriculum in Year 1 enables all pupils to make a smooth transition from the early years by providing less able pupils with opportunities to continue to develop the skills they need to access the Key Stage 1 curriculum.
- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - making sure that plans for improvement include precise detail about what needs to be done and that their impact can be measured in terms of outcomes for pupils.
- Develop the role of subject leaders in evaluating and improving teaching and learning in their subjects, by:
 - ensuring they have the skills to measure pupils' progress and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects
 - enabling them to work alongside teachers to support them in their planning and to spread best practice across the school.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Middle and subject leaders are at the very early stages of developing their roles. They are neither fully involved in evaluating the progress pupils make nor are they involved in improvement planning, nor in driving improvement in teaching and learning. As a result, progress in improving teaching has been slow.
- The headteacher, strongly supported by the senior management team, provides clear direction and has acted swiftly to improve the quality of teaching and learning in reading in response to the dip in achievement in 2014. As a result, there has been an improvement in the standards pupils reach and the progress they make. The school has good capacity to improve further.
- Regular monitoring procedures check on pupils' progress, identify any underachievement and trigger appropriate interventions. They also enable leaders to hold teachers to account effectively and identify training needs.
- The senior leadership team has an accurate view of the school's performance and what can be improved further, although plans to achieve this lack precision and detail. The school is aware of this and is in the process of revising them.
- The school's links with its partner school, Whitley Village Primary, are used to good effect. This has had a positive impact upon the accuracy of teacher assessments and is beginning to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to support disadvantaged pupils. As a result, gaps in the performance between disadvantaged pupils and their peers have closed in reading, writing and mathematics. Similarly, sports funding is used well, both to provide specialist coaching for pupils and to improve the quality of teaching in physical education across the school. This has also led to increased participation rates in extracurricular and sports activities across the school.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, meets pupils' needs and aspirations, and prepares them adequately for citizenship in modern Britain through the projects they study and the joint activities carried out with the partner school. However, the curriculum in Year 1 requires improvement because a significant proportion of pupils begin Year 1 without the necessary skills to cope with the Key Stage 1 curriculum. They therefore find difficulty in making this transition.
- Pupils take part in regular trips and visits which extend their learning outside the classroom.
- The school provides good support for pupils who are vulnerable and those who have special educational needs and disabilities through its resourced provision and through the work of the family liaison officers. Significant successes in improving the progress these pupils make are evident. The school is committed to equal opportunity for all and staff actively tackle discrimination of any kind.
- Safeguarding procedures are robust and meet government requirements. The school is diligent in ensuring that pupils are safe. Staff and family liaison officers work very effectively with outside agencies to ensure that this is the case.
- The school is working closely with parents and actively encourages them to be involved in the school's work through, for instance, sessions where they can stay and be involved in their children's learning in the early years provision.
- The school works closely with families whose children do not attend regularly enough. As a result, persistent absence has decreased and attendance and punctuality have improved.
- The local authority provides light touch support for this school. The school buys in support to review its performance. This has had a positive impact upon the quality of teaching and learning in English.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is effective and has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas which need to be improved. Its members check on the school's performance regularly, including data that show pupils' standards of attainment and progress.
 - Governors are able to talk confidently about how the school has closed gaps in the performance between different groups through successful intervention. They have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and the performance of staff, including how good performance is rewarded and any underperformance is tackled. The efficiency of spending is scrutinised, for example, the effectiveness of the use of primary sport funding and of pupil premium funding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Pupils' attitudes towards their learning vary across the school. Pupils do not always respond to teachers' marking or act upon the guidance they are given to improve their work. When they are asked to discuss ideas with a partner or are asked to solve problems in small groups, they usually respond well and are keen to share their ideas with the class, but this is not always the case. When they are not directly involved in activities pupils sometimes lose concentration and interest and become restless.
- Pupils arrive at lessons promptly and get on with their work willingly and demonstrate a willingness to learn.
- Pupils' conduct in lessons and around the school is good. Low-level disruption is rare and pupils behave sensibly during the changeover of lessons, during lunch and break times. They are polite and respectful, but when they are not actively involved in activities, they lose concentration and interest.
- Pupils play a full part in decision-making in the school and take their responsibilities, for instance as school councillors and ambassadors, very seriously.
- Bullying or any form of discrimination is rare and actively discouraged. When it does happen, pupils are confident that it is dealt with swiftly and effectively.
- Pupils with special educational needs or who are vulnerable receive good care and support from staff within the school to make good or better progress.
- Attendance is below the national average. Attendance has improved over the last year as a result of the school working closely with parents and through the support of the family liaison officers.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- The school is meticulous in its efforts to keep pupils safe, is able to identify any risks and, as a result, to prevent any harm. The school has effective systems in place to ensure that all aspects of safety are rigorously maintained.
- Pupils are well-informed about bullying in its various forms and how to deal with it.
- The school works closely with other agencies to ensure that pupils are safe and supported well.
- The pupils themselves have a good understanding of how to stay safe and of potential risks; they know how to protect themselves against these, including when using the internet.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is too variable across the school. There are examples of good and outstanding teaching, but these are the exception.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work well together and ask pupils searching questions to see how much pupils have understood and to extend their learning.
- When teachers use effective strategies to engage pupils' interest, pupils usually respond with enthusiasm. For example, a group of Year 2 pupils were very keen to improve their teacher's writing about their trip, suggesting ways they could make it more interesting while another group worked with partners to see how they could improve their description of the trip by playing a game.
- Pupils make good progress when activities are well matched to their needs. For instance, Years 3 and 4 made good progress in their reading, because activities were well matched to their needs and they knew exactly which books to choose. Similarly, Year 5 pupils were able to work out fractions as a result of a series of well-sequenced activities, well-matched to their capabilities; but, too often, pupils find tasks too easy or too difficult and this slows their progress.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly but the impact of marking is too variable. There are examples of good practice, where information about pupils' progress determines next steps for individual pupils and pupils maintain a dialogue with teachers about what they need to do next and are given extra challenges to complete. However, pupils do not always receive the specific guidance they need to help them improve their work and they are not always given the time they need to act upon the guidance they are given. As a result, they continue to make the same mistakes and their progress slows.
- The teaching of reading is effective and children enjoy their reading. Most read fluently and with understanding, are able to explain what they have read, predict what will happen next and discuss the characters in the books.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is developed adequately through opportunities to reflect, to empathise with others and to increase their understanding of cultures and faiths other than their own across the wider curriculum, for instance, through their topic work, religious education and in art.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The proportion of pupils making the progress expected of them from their starting points compares favourably with national figures. However, too few pupils make more than expected progress in reading and in mathematics by the end of Year 6. Most children enter Year 1 with skills and knowledge below those typical for their age and many are not yet ready to access the Key Stage 1 curriculum.
- By the end of Year 6, standards in mathematics, reading and writing are below average. Over the last three years standards have fluctuated in all subjects. After a dip in 2014, standards in reading have improved.
- Work seen during the inspection indicates that standards in reading, writing and mathematics have risen over the last year and the rate of pupils' progress has also increased, so that the proportion of pupils making more than the progress expected of them has also increased. A higher proportion of pupils are now on track to make good progress in relation to their starting points than was the case in 2014.
- The most able pupils usually make the progress expected of them from their starting points in mathematics, reading and writing, with some reaching the highest levels by the end of Year 6.
- In the work seen in pupils' books it is evident that pupils write effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences and use a good range of vocabulary and structures. However, inaccuracies in spelling sometimes mar their work.
- Progress in reading is good. Pupils are taught phonics (letters and the sounds they make) effectively and are able to apply their knowledge in reading and writing. Guided reading sessions in Key Stage 2 led by teachers and teaching assistants are effective in developing pupils' reading skills.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. They make better progress than their peers as a result of the extra help they are given, according to need, both in class and in groups. Teaching assistants usually provide sensitive and effective support, enabling these pupils to participate successfully in whole-class activities. Pupils in the resourced provision also make good progress because of the well-tailored support they receive which meets their needs effectively.
- The extra support that the school provides, such as extra help in the classroom, support from teaching assistants enables disadvantaged pupils to reach their targets and to make good progress. Gaps between the attainment of these pupils in English and mathematics and their classmates have closed. They reach the same standards as other pupils in the school in mathematics and higher standards, by approximately one term, than their classmates in English. They reach lower standards by approximately two terms than non-disadvantaged pupils nationally in English and by three terms in mathematics.

The early years provision

is good

- Children make good progress and achieve well in the Nursery and Reception classes as a result of consistently good teaching. Most children start in the early years provision with skills and knowledge that are low compared to those typical for their age, especially in their communication and language and their understanding of the world. Just over half achieve good levels of development in all areas of learning during their time in the early years provision. These children begin Year 1 as confident learners, well prepared for the Key Stage 1 curriculum; however, a large proportion is still working towards these goals.
- As a result of very well-established routines, children settle in quickly and behave well. They clearly enjoy the activities planned for them, take turns and learn and play well together. They know how to stay safe. When playing together they are enthusiastic and display good levels of concentration.
- Children make particularly good progress in developing their speaking, reading, writing and their personal and social skills. They are keen to talk about their learning and are confident using simple reading and writing skills in their play, writing notes and labels. In the Nursery they enjoyed retelling the story of *The Gruffalo* and in solving problems, such as why shadows get bigger or smaller.
- The provision is very well led and managed. Good teaching and learning and a high level of consistency, together with good safety procedures are all promoted successfully. Adults work together very effectively to ensure that all children are able to make good progress. They monitor individual progress on a daily basis and use this information effectively to plan next steps for children's learning.

- Activities led by teachers and teaching assistants are well planned and designed to excite and interest children. Adults take every opportunity to engage children in conversation to extend their learning, for example in role-play and in exploring elements such as water and sand and children respond enthusiastically. As a result, they make rapid progress in developing their language and communication skills.
- The outside area is used effectively with well-planned activities which interest children and enable them to take the next steps in their learning.

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	134866
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	461925

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	340
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Di Buckley
Headteacher	Amanda Powell
Date of previous school inspection	30 May 2012
Telephone number	0151 355 1546
Fax number	0151 350 6460
Email address	adminjunior@theacorns.cheshire.sch.uk

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