

Heronsgate School

Lichfield Down, Walnut Tree, Milton Keynes, MK7 7BW

Inspection dates 17–18 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	-
	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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not yet good because

- Not enough pupils across the school make consistently good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- There are gaps in the previous learning of pupils that have not been filled quickly enough.
- Pupils do not develop the skills to regularly produce longer and more detailed pieces of writing.
- Pupils do not develop the confidence to use what they already know about mathematics to solve problems speedily and accurately.
- The level of challenge for some pupils, including the most able, is not always high enough.
- The marking of pupils' work is inconsistent and not regularly revisited to ensure weaknesses are addressed. This particularly impacts on the progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.
- The checks made of the work of the school by staff with additional responsibilities and by governors are not rigorous enough to identify and address all areas for further improvement.
- Staff in support roles do not always challenge pupils enough to boost their rate of progress.
- Pupils' behaviour requires improvement because it is not consistently good. Pupils do not always feel safe as a small number of bullying incidents occur.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has a good grasp of what works well in the school and where further improvement is required. She is taking decisive action to eradicate weak teaching and ineffective management.
- The quality of teaching has improved during the year and, as a result, the proportion of pupils making good progress is growing.
- Pupils' reading skills are better than those seen in writing and mathematics.
- Senior staff, subject coordinators, year group leaders and governors clearly recognise that more remains to be done to ensure consistently effective practice in all areas.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is promoted well.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 23 lessons and a range of other school activities. Several lesson observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. Inspectors also looked in detail at the work in pupils’ books and heard several pupils read.
- Planned and informal discussions were held with pupils throughout the inspection.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, including in his role as special educational needs coordinator, the literacy and numeracy leaders and the pastoral manager.
- The lead inspector spoke to members of the governing body and a representative of the academy trust.
- Inspectors took account of the 41 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) and spoke to several parents during the inspection. Inspectors also considered the 33 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school’s own information about pupil progress. They also took account of records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Sue Hall, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lynn Lowery	Additional inspector
Oliver Flitcroft	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized junior school.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. More pupils are from minority ethnic groups than the national average. Slightly fewer pupils speak English as an additional language than is seen nationally, with many of these pupils being dual language speakers.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is slightly below the national average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for those known at some stage to be eligible for free school meals or those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below the national average.
- The headteacher took up post in January 2014. New leaders for literacy, numeracy and special educational needs have been appointed since this time, as have some year group leaders. There have been several other staff changes, and more are imminent.
- Heronsgate School converted to become an academy school on 1 April 2013. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The school is part of the Milton Keynes Education Trust. It works with a national leader of education.
- In May 2015, the school became part of a national initiative to raise standards, which has included working with external advisors.
- In 2014, the school met the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching in all classes is consistently effective and matches the quality of the best in the school by:
 - checking that activities contain an appropriately high level of challenge for pupils of different abilities, and particularly the most able
 - making sure that the marking of pupils' work regularly identifies what they need to do to improve and such areas are revisited, particularly for the lower-attaining pupils.
- Accelerate the rate of progress made by:
 - ensuring that pupils have more opportunities to write at greater length and in detail
 - enabling pupils to use what they already know about mathematics to solve problems speedily and with confidence.
- Improve the monitoring of all aspects of the work of the school by:
 - ensuring that staff and, where appropriate, governors regularly and rigorously check the areas for which they hold responsibility in order to identify and address areas for further improvement
 - making sure that the few bullying incidents that occur are addressed in a consistent manner by all staff
 - checking that all additional support provided for groups of pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, is focused on enabling them to make good progress.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because, while there have been significant recent developments in key areas, there is further to go. The headteacher provides effective leadership which has been pivotal to the improvements made recently.
- Pupils' progress has improved over the last year because leaders are committed to providing equality of opportunity for the pupils and countering discrimination of any kind. There are, however, inconsistencies in provision and in addressing the gaps in pupils' learning. The changes made have not yet had a marked impact on the standards achieved by the end of Year 6. However, progress across the school is improving.
- Several staff with subject responsibilities are quite new to their roles. While they have made a sound start in checking the work in pupils' books and the progress made in lessons, such checks are not regular or rigorous. This makes it difficult for some staff to pinpoint exactly what needs to improve further.
- Leaders have a clearly articulated vision for the school and understand how this is to be achieved. They recognise that some staff in teaching and support roles have found it difficult to change long-established working practices and that the pace of improvement has not been as rapid as was needed.
- Targets for the management of teachers' performance are linked to school priorities and are now firmly linked to the progress pupils make. There is an increasing programme of professional development, although this has not always included those in support roles.
- Joint lesson observations and detailed discussions with the headteacher show she has an accurate view of what works well and where further improvement is required. Observations with other members of staff and school records indicate some evaluations appear generous and are not sufficiently focused on the progress pupils make.
- The school works with staff in the other schools within the Milton Keynes Education Trust and now with external advisors. A recent focus has been on work in the classroom. This has not yet sufficiently highlighted the work in pupils' books and the progress made over time.
- Staff working with disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs have sometimes focused on pastoral support to a greater degree than academic progress. Additional funding, including for pupils entitled to the pupil premium, is used to provide individual and small group support as well as access to a range of school activities and resources. Until very recently, the effectiveness of additional support and the progress the pupils make has not been tracked carefully enough. Staff with responsibilities in this area sometimes struggle to identify the impact of the support on pupil progress.
- The primary school physical education and sport funding is used to provide activities to extend pupil's skills in a range of sports. The school is in the early stages of monitoring the effectiveness of current arrangements and the impact this has on provision for the pupils.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, with a firm focus on the development of key skills in literacy and numeracy. The school provides a range of activities to help pupils develop an understanding of British values. This has included recent mock elections and discussions about democracy. This helps pupils prepare for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. The school places a strong focus on specific values, with pupils recognising the 'value of the month' and how this should be reflected in what they do in different situations. Pupils develop skills when working as part of a team, including when growing vegetables in the school courtyards. They also understood their responsibilities when making decisions about what type of chickens the school was to buy, and how to care for their poultry and market the eggs that are laid.
- Most of the parents who responded to the online questionnaire and those spoken to during the inspection have positive views about the care and education provided for their children. Some have concerns, including about the information they receive, homework and the quality of teaching. The school recognises that the many recent changes may not have always been understood by parents.
- Safeguarding arrangements are effective and meet statutory requirements.
- With the many improvements made to planning, teaching, learning, the organisation of activities and the checks made by senior leaders the school is well placed to continue to improve.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance of the school requires improvement. Governors are working with commitment to ensure they are able to hold the school to account for the progress made. The effectiveness of the governing body has improved because members have become more aware of the quality of provision in the school.
 - Governors now understand what the data tell them about the progress of different groups of pupils.

They are informed about aspects of teaching and use data about pupil progress to support the decisions they make about staff pay awards. For example, no additional payments were made last year because of dips in pupils' progress.

- Governors have a standard number of meetings and recognise that, with the amount of work to be done, this has to be monitored. Governors recognise that they have previously devolved responsibility for key areas and not checked rigorously enough if these have met requirements. This has, for example, included the recording of staff's suitability to work with the pupils and whether the school website meets requirements. However, when questions are raised, immediate action is taken, showing leaders' and governors' commitment to making improvements. Therefore a formal review of the work of the governing body is not required.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because it is not consistently good. Some pupils do not make a lot of effort to answer questions in discussions or to push themselves and try their hardest. The sample of recent work shows that at times this is untidily presented and of limited length and quality.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is often good. Most pupils get on well together and some activities, such as lunchtimes, are pleasant social occasions where pupils enjoy happily chatting and playing together. Very occasionally, as seen in a Year 3 physical education lesson, the behaviour of a small number of pupils is not well managed and has a negative impact on that of others.
- The school has done a lot of recent work on values, which has helped pupils to develop an understanding of their place in society. They recognise that poor behaviour is not tolerated in school. Leaders take a strong stance on this and have made a small number of temporary exclusions to make clear to all pupils what is acceptable and what is not. Attendance is in line with national averages.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure requires improvement. Pupils, staff and parents recognise that there have been a few instances when bullying has occurred. This has included calling other pupils names and making inappropriate comments to or about others.
- Pupils are able to explain the different types of bullying that could occur. They know this is a deliberate and repeated action and recognise the dangers of social media. They know there are people they can talk to in school should they have any worries, including teachers and the pastoral manager. They are less confident that staff in support roles, including at lunchtime, take sufficient action.
- Pupils have a reasonable understanding of how to keep themselves and their friends safe and recognise their behaviour has an impact on others. Visitors to school talk to pupils about how to keep safe in a range of situations. Procedures to check the suitability of adults to work with children now meet requirements.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Pupils' work shows the quality of teaching has improved during the year. While this requires improvement overall, there is a growing proportion that is good. However, observations, pupils' books and data all show that there are still some inconsistencies. There are gaps in pupils' learning that are not yet being addressed as well as they could be.
- Staff plan in year-group teams to ensure that pupils are provided with similar experiences. They often plan activities at different levels and pupils choose which they feel confident to try. This is mostly successful in promoting pupils' progress. However, sometimes pupils of all abilities are not fully challenged and not enough is expected of them on a consistent basis.
- Where there is limited challenge in tasks, this particularly impacts on the progress made by the most able pupils who are not regularly working at the appropriate higher level. For example, some Year 6 pupils considered 'What is advertising?', with the aim of deciding what type of advertisements they will produce when making their own biscuits. There was, however, limited depth to the discussion and little apparent research or realistic costings to really make demands upon their thinking.
- Pupils are given opportunities to read fairly regularly in groups but rarely individually to a trained adult. Few have individual reading records to identify what they have found difficult or how to improve further. They are helped to read accurately but their comprehension and ability to infer meaning from the context of the story are not always strong.
- The teaching of grammar, spelling and punctuation is better than that for other aspects of their writing.

Pupils' books show that, across the school, they do not have enough opportunities to extend their writing skills by producing longer and more detailed pieces of work. This makes it difficult for them to achieve the higher levels in writing.

- The teaching of mathematics ensures that pupils have a reasonably secure understanding of basic numbers and shapes. Pupils do not always understand how to use what they are taught to solve problems speedily and accurately.
- The marking of pupils' work was a weakness identified during the school year and guidance was given to staff. The sample of recent work shows this is still not applied consistently. Sometimes there is little evidence of regular marking or identification of areas for improvement. Where marking does take place, this is rarely re-visited to see if the pupil has addressed such problems. This does little to boost pupils' skills. Lower-attaining pupils in particular say marking does not always help them to know what they have to do to improve.
- The use of time within lessons varies. In successful sessions, time targets for the completion of short discussions are used well. This ensures activities move along briskly so that pupils have opportunities to not only discuss their ideas but also record them. Occasionally, in some other activities, the pupils spend a lot of time discussing their ideas but their books indicate that some rarely write at length and in depth.
- Staff have strong working relationships with the pupils. They praise their efforts and pupils often try to please the adults they work with, as seen in Year 5 discussions about *The Highwayman*.
- The help given to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is varied. This is also the case for pupils entitled to support from the pupil premium and those at the early stages of speaking English. Some support staff are well briefed on exactly what the pupils are to do and to learn. In other activities, support is very limited and occasionally, for example when learning about fractions in Year 3, explanations to the pupils are not clear.
- The checks made on the effectiveness of support, especially for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, are not very detailed. In the staff questionnaire, some staff in support roles indicated that they do not feel that the school makes appropriate provision for their professional development.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils' skills and understanding when they join the school in Year 3 are generally similar to what is expected for their age. The achievement of pupils requires improvement because the progress they make in Key Stage 2 is not consistently good. Standards and the rate of progress made have declined in the last two years.
- The 2014 national tests at the end of Year 6 showed that the proportion of pupils who made the progress expected of them was slightly below the national average in reading, mathematics and writing. A below-average proportion made more than expected progress in each area from their different starting points. Standards were generally below national averages in reading, writing and mathematics but matched the national average in grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- In 2014, boys did not do as well as the girls, to a greater extent than seen nationally, especially in writing and reading. Inspection observations indicate that, in some classes, more boys are identified as lower achievers than girls. Assessment data now identify the differences between such groups and information has been used to improve the curriculum. Subject leaders have been involved in discussions about how topics are chosen and resources to interest boys are used.
- The school is now working more successfully to close the gap between what pupils achieve in this school and nationally. However, there have been considerable inconsistencies in the rate of progress made by pupils. Leaders are now working with determination to address this situation but are aware that, because of the gaps in their learning, the Year 6 cohort of pupils is not set to do particularly well this year. Data indicate, though, that the picture is more positive in other year groups.
- In 2014, disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 were more than two terms behind their classmates in writing, mathematics and reading. Compared to other pupils nationally, they were slightly more than two terms behind in reading, writing and mathematics. Recent data indicate the picture this year is more positive and these gaps are starting to narrow in all areas. This is because of more effective use of pupil premium funding, better assessment and increasingly better targeted support.
- The progress of the most able pupils requires improvement because they have not always made the progress of which they are capable. Not enough has been expected of these pupils but, with improved assessment systems, the school is now checking and tracking individual and group progress in a more organised manner.

- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make progress that requires improvement. The school has rightly recognised that the support given to pupils has often been of a pastoral nature and not sufficiently focused on improving progress. Leaders in this area have not always used assessment information well enough to drive teaching and learning forwards for all pupils.
- In 2014, pupils speaking English as an additional language outperformed their classmates, particularly in writing and mathematics. This largely remains the case now because these pupils are often well motivated to try hard with their work.
- The school provides a range of sports-based activities to help pupils develop healthy lifestyles. Sports coaches are used to extend skills in outdoor games, dance and gymnastics. School leaders are at an early stage in identifying the impact of such activities and how this compares to activities led by teaching staff.

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	139449
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	456231

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	486
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kevin Gowans
Headteacher	Jane Edwards
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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