

# Ashmead Combined School

Cole Road, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, HP21 8SU

**Inspection dates** 15–16 July 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
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.

- Early years provision is good. Nursery and Reception children make good progress. More directed teaching of basic reading, writing and mathematical skills than previously is ensuring that children are now well prepared for learning in Years 1 and 2.
- Achievement by the end of Year 6 is good, although there is some unevenness in progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the school. However, pupils' learning in a range of other subjects, including the creative arts, is a significant strength.
- The teaching of phonics (the linking of sounds and letters) has improved significantly this year.
- Pupils show good attitudes to learning, feel very safe and behave well.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well. As a result, the gaps between their attainment and that of their peers, both in school and nationally, are closing steadily.
- Pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs are supported well.
- Pupils experience a rich range of experiences during their time in the school.
- Senior leadership is effective. The monitoring and improvement of teaching have had a positive impact. The quality of teaching is good overall.
- Governors are well informed about the quality of teaching and make a good contribution to driving improvement.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There are inconsistencies in the rates of progress pupils make across the school. Progress in Year 6 is more rapid than in any other year group.
- Teachers do not have consistently well-developed skills in teaching handwriting so as to ensure pupils can write quickly and achieve high quality presentation.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 31 lessons, six of which were visited jointly with one of the co-headteachers.
- Inspectors looked closely at pupils’ written work for the current school year. They listened to some pupils reading.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils, two governors, a representative from the local authority and the school’s senior and subject leaders.
- Inspectors took account of the 35 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 43 responses to the online questionnaire for parents, Parent View.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a range of its documents, including plans for improvement and records of checks on the quality of teaching. They also considered records of meetings of the governing body and those relating to behaviour, attendance, safeguarding and the systems used to check pupils’ progress.

## Inspection team

George Logan, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Webster

Additional Inspector

Bimla Thakur

Additional Inspector

Sahreen Siddiqui

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The school serves a diverse urban community. Around two thirds of pupils are White British. The remainder comes from a wide range of ethnic groups. Pakistani pupils, around one fifth of those on roll, form the largest single non White group.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is close to the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are in the care of the local authority.
- The school meets 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.
- In the early years, Nursery children attend either a morning or an afternoon session each day, while Reception children all attend full time.
- The number of pupils in the school is increasing. There will be three classes in each year group by September 2016.
- The school has been involved, as a lead member, in a local initiative that seeks to promote higher expectations and improved achievement in schools which serve urban communities in challenging circumstances.
- The school is led jointly by two headteachers. This arrangement has existed since September 2008.
- The school is part of a cooperative trust with two local schools, one providing for infant pupils and the other for the secondary age range.
- The school offers a breakfast club. This provision was reviewed as part of the current inspection.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that there is greater consistency in rates of progress within all year groups and over time through the setting of higher expectations for pupils' progress at the end of each year.
- Ensure that the standards of presentation of pupils' written work improve and that pupils are prepared better for the demands of their future education by ensuring:
  - there are clear expectations for how staff help pupils acquire a fluent and legible style of writing
  - teachers' skills in the teaching of writing, particularly handwriting, are consistently good.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The co-headteachers, senior leaders and middle managers together hold a very clear vision for the school and consistently communicate high expectations and aspirations for behaviour and for the development of the whole child. The culture and ethos of the school are shaped around these fundamental principles.
- While pupils typically achieve well over time, not enough priority has been given to ensuring consistency rates of progress, so that progress has typically been less rapid in some year groups and subjects than in others. This is why leadership and management are not judged to be outstanding. Recent actions, however, are contributing to rising trends in pupils' achievement in early years, in their knowledge of phonics and in the writing of older pupils. The school knows what has to be done to accelerate rates of progress further.
- There are strengths in the leadership of the early years and of the provision for pupils with special educational needs. Other subject leaders have developed their skills through a range of local partnership arrangements. They undertake joint lesson observations and detailed examination of pupils' work alongside senior leaders, and thus develop their skills effectively. As a result, they have an increasingly accurate overview of the strengths of their subjects, ensuring good capacity in the leadership structure.
- Senior leaders have high expectations of all staff and this has contributed well to emerging improvements. The leadership and monitoring of teaching are effective. Staff are well supported to develop their teaching skills. Procedures for setting targets to improve teachers' practice are used well.
- In their evaluation of the school's effectiveness, school leaders are realistic about where further improvements are needed.
- Senior leaders have implemented the recent changes to the subjects taught, so that the current plans are aligned fully to new requirements. Some planned activities are the key strengths of the school. A highly-creative approach, often based around literary themes such as *Fantastic Mr Fox* and *The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch* are supported by the well-judged use of first-hand experiences. This promotes a thirst for knowledge and understanding across an unusually broad, but well-balanced, range of activities. It fosters high levels of creative excellence, particularly in two- and three-dimensional art and design. The school is skilled at creating 'wow' factors that enthuse pupils and stimulate their imaginations exceptionally well. For example, when pupils in Year 1 began their current topic, they found the classroom fitted out with an indoor beach. On the first morning, a live 'lighthouse keeper' was in position, having his lunch! The learning activities provided have not, however, been focused as consistently on ensuring rapid progress in the development of key skills in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school is adopting a revised system for evaluating pupils' progress. This is on track for full implementation by September 2015, but it is not yet possible to judge the impact of this initiative.
- School leaders closely monitor the impact of pupil premium expenditure. This has included the employment of additional staff and the provision of specialist resources to enhance the teaching of literacy and numeracy. Their actions have been effective in closing the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in all subjects across both key stages.
- The primary sport funding is used well to access specialist sports coaching and to provide wide access to after-school sporting clubs and competitions. It enables pupils to experience sports and activities, such as handball, cricket and rock-climbing, which they might not otherwise have tried. The level of participation in clubs and competitions has increased significantly.
- The local authority has a light touch relationship with the school, based on its standing as an existing 'good' school. There has been recent specific input to support improved teaching of phonics and to evaluate writing in Key Stage 2. Beyond that, however, the local authority has only a limited knowledge of the pattern of achievement across the school.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Assemblies effectively promote the school's fundamental values. Pupils treat each other with great respect and there is a seamless culture of tolerance across all groups in the school. The school promotes British values effectively with evidence, for example, of pupils learning about how the democratic process works in practice. As a result, pupils are made aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens and are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school works hard to ensure equality of opportunity for all. While, in broad terms, discrimination in any form is not tolerated, there is still some evidence, between year groups, of variable rates of progress over time across the school. Pupils in Year 6 make significantly greater progress than those, for example, in Years 3 and 4.

- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements and, on the evidence seen, are fully effective.
- Links with parents are very good. Their views, as reflected in the Parent View survey, were overwhelmingly positive.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governance has continued to improve since the last inspection. Governors have a wide range of expertise and skills. They know the school well and are ambitious for its future. They undertake training to improve their skills further. Governors have good access to information about the school's performance and are closely involved with the school's work. They contribute to the self-evaluation process. In broad, terms, they are successful in holding school leaders to account for improving achievement, behaviour and the quality of teaching. However, they have not always focused sufficiently on the pace of learning of year groups other than Year 6.
  - Governors understand information on the performance of all groups of pupils, particularly those supported through pupil premium funding. They know how the school is doing in relation to schools nationally and understand the effectiveness of teaching. Governors are closely involved in the management of teachers' performance. Pay increases are linked to the outcomes of this process. Governors support school leaders in tackling any underperformance.
  - The governing body ensures, alongside senior leaders, that statutory duties are met. These include the primary requirement to keep pupils safe.

## The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils engage and apply themselves well in lessons. They show positive attitudes to learning, particularly where the teaching sets high expectations. They enjoy the special events that the school provides and talk about their experiences enthusiastically. However, their attitudes to learning are not consistently outstanding because their written work is not always produced at a consistently high standard.
- Pupils eagerly take on many responsibilities around the school, such as 'befrienders' who look after those who may feel isolated in the playground. Other pupils act as prefects, as junior road safety leaders and eco-leaders.
- Pupils know that they are expected to complete their homework, and almost all do so.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school is consistently good, with few incidents of misbehaviour. Exclusions are rare. The systems to manage behaviour are well established and consistently applied. Staff deal with any incidents discreetly and effectively.
- Attendance is slightly below the national average, but has improved in the last year. Staff monitor attendance closely and respond quickly to any indications of excessive absence.

### Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. The site and premises are very secure. The suitability of staff is checked thoroughly prior to their appointment.
- Pupils feel extremely safe in school. They are very confident that adults will look out for them. The school ensures that pupils are able to keep themselves safe. Pupils are knowledgeable about staying safe on the roads, particularly when cycling. They understand the need to be cautious when close to strangers. They are well informed about the potential risks of cyber bullying. The school has close relationships with the local police and is always alert to any local issues, including extremism, which might affect the well-being of children out of school.
- Pupils understand that bullying occurs and may take different forms. They feel that it is a rare event in school. If any issues do arise, pupils are confident that the school would respond immediately to any emerging problems.
- The breakfast club provides well to meet the needs of those pupils who arrive early at school.

## The quality of teaching is good

- While the pace of learning is not equally rapid in all year groups, the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics is good overall. As a result, pupils achieve well. Particularly high expectations of pupils' achievement in Year 6 contribute to rapid progress and compensate for some slightly slower progress in other years.

- The improved teaching of phonics and early reading skills in the early years, as well as of children's writing skills, is now securing strong foundations for pupils to learn well in Years 1 and 2. The support for disadvantaged pupils is good. Good teaching and effective support by well-prepared learning support staff ensure that these pupils make similar progress to the others. As a result, they do not fall behind and the gaps in their achievement are progressively closed.
- When the work is particularly challenging, pupils respond very positively. In a Year 4 art lesson, pupils had previously learned how to achieve tonal variations when representing the face of a fox using pastels. They learned further how to extend their skills in the subtle use of charcoal. Expert modelling by the teacher, showing pupils how to create tonal layers representing the fox's fur, motivated pupils exceptionally well. Pupils experienced moments of awe and wonder as the teacher developed a model drawing. This set a high expectation for pupils to build upon their earlier high quality work attempts in pastel. The teacher provided the right level of challenge for the full range of pupils. Relationships were excellent and pupils were well motivated by the teacher's high expectations.
- Teaching is having an increasingly positive impact upon the development of pupils' writing skills, particularly in Years 3 to 6. This has been a recent priority. However, teachers have not, over time, had sufficiently high expectations of younger pupils' handwriting. Although the school has begun to tackle this issue in early years, the lack of clear expectations for the teaching of handwriting has been a disadvantage. Too few pupils acquire a fluent, joined style by the end of Year 2. This affects the speed at which pupils can write and has an adverse effect upon the quality of their written work.
- Teachers' marking is mostly thorough in evaluating whether the identified learning is met. It does not, however, consistently ensure that pupils make rapid improvements in, for example, the presentation of their work or always challenge poor handwriting and presentation.
- Homework makes a good contribution to pupils' learning and pupils typically seek to complete the tasks set each week.

### **The achievement of pupils is good**

- The last inspection report indicated that standards by the end of Year 6 appeared to be broadly average. Since then standards have fluctuated but in more recent times, the school has been successful in moving standards to securely average, keeping pace with improvements nationally.
- The school plans well for pupils' personal and social development alongside their acquisition of academic skills. The range of subjects taught is structured so that pupils experience a good range of physical, cultural and creative opportunities.
- Pupils' experiences and achievements in subjects such as art and design, physical development and the creative and performing arts, contribute strongly to the depth and quality of their learning.
- While there are some inconsistencies in pupils' achievement that the school has not tackled as promptly as it should, recent actions to secure more systematic teaching of reading and writing in the early years are having an impact upon the rates of progress in Reception. Most children in early years now make good progress, although the proportion reaching a good level of development remains below national averages.
- Weak past teaching of writing, including handwriting, has had an adverse effect upon pupils' handwriting, and their overall writing skills. While some pupils have very good writing skills, a significant number across the school do not.
- The slow start in the past in developing reading and writing skills in early years has adversely affected pupils' progress in Years 1 and 2, so that there is much ground to make up. Consequently, standards in reading, writing and mathematics have typically been below the national average by the end of Year 2, and are likely to be so again in 2015.
- Nevertheless, the recent focus on improving the teaching of phonics (the sounds linked to letters) has produced a significant rise in the proportion of pupils achieving the nationally expected level at the end of Year 1 in 2015. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are now better placed to attain higher standards by the end of Year 2. All pupils are making at least expected progress, with an increased proportion now making good progress. Older pupils make good progress in developing their reading skills because the school places considerable importance upon developing their love of literature.
- Pupils make good progress as they move through Key Stage 2. However, the most rapid progress, by some way, is in Year 6. For some pupils, progress is outstanding. The most-able pupils in Year 6 are achieving increasingly well. They attain more highly and, in 2014, made more rapid progress than similar pupils nationally. Both in 2014, and on initial unvalidated results in 2015, the proportion of able pupils attaining the challenging Level 6 in mathematics, for example, has been well above the national average.
- Pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs, some of whom have challenging

behavioural needs, are supported well. In the current year, most have made better than expected progress from their different starting points.

- Pupils of Pakistani heritage, although lagging behind the others by the end of Year 2, make rapid progress in Key Stage 2, so that the gaps in attainment by the end of Year 6 are insignificant.
- In 2014, there was a gap of two terms in overall attainment between disadvantaged Year 6 pupils and others in the school. Disadvantaged pupils were around three terms behind other pupils in the school, two terms in writing, in grammar, punctuation and spelling, and one term in reading. Against all pupils nationally, disadvantaged pupils were one term behind in mathematics, reading and grammar, punctuation and spelling, and three terms behind in writing. Currently, across the school, these pupils are often making more rapid progress than the others. Consequently, the gaps in attainment are narrowing still further in the current year.

### The early years provision

is good

- Both the provision and children's learning in early years are good. The pace of improvement has accelerated recently after slow progress following the last inspection. This was because the school had reduced the amount of time given to the direct teaching of reading and writing skills. This led to a decline in the proportion of children acquiring the expected skills in these important areas. Consequently, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development demonstrated little improvement. However, actions taken in the last year have led to changes in practice, and children's skills, particularly in reading and writing, are now improving rapidly.
- Most children enter Nursery with skills below those typical for their age. Staff give particular priority to developing children's personal and social skills. Improved teaching of phonics in the last year, both in Nursery and Reception, ensures that children now have a better knowledge of sounds and letters. This supports the development of their early reading skills.
- Nursery children account for just under half of the children who enter Reception. New children join at that point from a range of pre-school settings and with varying existing skills and knowledge. Some of these children enter with lower levels of skills and knowledge than those from the school's own nursery.
- With targeted and mostly good teaching, children, including those who have special educational needs, are currently achieving well in most areas of learning. They are increasingly well prepared for entry to Year 1. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development was still below the national average in 2014. This is improving steadily as the benefits of the more intensive focus on reading and writing skills work through the system.
- Adults teach children specific skills in small groups, including reading, writing and mathematics. Children then choose from a range of other activities that build well upon their earlier learning. Their independent learning skills are developing well.
- Children have good access to outdoor learning. The well-resourced outdoor area offers a wide range of activities to extend children's growing knowledge of the world and to promote learning across all the expected areas. However, outdoor opportunities to extend learning in reading, writing and number are not fully developed.
- Children behave well. They show good attitudes to learning and maintain an interest in activities for lengthy periods. Children are very safe and are well looked after.
- The school works well with parents and carers. There are good arrangements for parents and children to get to know school routines prior to the new school year. Parents are encouraged to be involved with their children's education after their children start school.
- Staff undertake detailed observations and keep thorough records of children's progress. This information forms the basis of the planning of children's future work.
- The leadership of early years is good and has ensured that there is clear staff awareness of the need for improved standards in reading, writing and the more effective development of handwriting.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	110356
<b>Local authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	449742

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	626
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	James Blackburn
<b>Co-Headteachers</b>	Mike Pearse and Marcus Pickover
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 February 2010
<b>Telephone number</b>	01296 484434
<b>Fax number</b>	01296 393425
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:office@ashmeadschool.org.uk">office@ashmeadschool.org.uk</a>

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)  
[Store St](#)  
[Manchester](#)  
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2015

