

Watling Lower School

Bull Pond Lane, Dunstable LU6 3BJ

Inspection dates 23–24 September 2015

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher is supported well by other leaders, including the governors. They have taken effective action to improve the quality of teaching and increase pupils’ progress.
- Teaching has improved since the last inspection and is typically good. Teachers give pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work.
- Pupils are enthusiastic learners. They make good progress across the school, especially in reading and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well.
- In the early years children learn in a nurturing environment. Activities are well planned, resulting in children who are excited about their learning.
- Children in Reception engage enthusiastically with their learning. Good leadership and teaching ensure that they make good progress.
- Pupils are well behaved around the school. They show respect for one another and for adults.
- The school ensures that pupils are well looked after. Pupils say they feel safe in school.
- Attendance has improved and now meets the national average.
- Pupils’ good spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is promoted well through the good range of subjects they study.
- The governing body is well led and governors have an accurate view of the school’s performance.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not consistently good in a small minority of lessons.
- Pupils are not always set work that is hard enough in some lessons.
- Teachers do not consistently ensure that pupils’ handwriting, punctuation and grammar are of the highest standards.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop and make more effective use of the systems already in place to ensure that:
 - teaching is consistently good and better so that pupils' learning can be outstanding
 - pupils of all abilities are suitably challenged in all lessons
 - teachers' expectations of the standards of pupils' handwriting, punctuation and grammar are consistently high.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher provides clear and incisive leadership for this improving school. There have been new appointments at senior and middle leadership since the last inspection. These new leaders support the headteacher well, regularly reviewing the work of the school and sharing high ambitions for the pupils.
- There have been many changes to membership of the governing body, including the appointment of a new Chair of the Governing Body, since the last inspection. Governors have received the appropriate training to fulfil all aspects of their role. Governors visit the school to gain first-hand experience of its work and effectiveness. They meet with subject leaders, visit lessons and look at the work in pupils' books.
- Together with the staff, leaders have created a caring and nurturing learning environment. As a result, pupils are confident learners. They enjoy learning and almost all pupils are proud of their work. The improvements in teaching and rising standards demonstrate leaders' capacity to secure improvements.
- The local authority is providing effective support for the school. For example, they have funded training programmes for middle leaders. This has contributed to improvements in teaching and in middle leadership.
- The headteacher has worked closely with a National Leader of Education who has validated the school's evaluation of its performance. The headteacher's thorough approach to evaluating the work of the school means that leaders have an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. Well led by the headteacher, they effectively use this information to identify the school's improvement priorities.
- Leaders have an accurate view of teaching across the school. They use a wide range of information, including pupil achievement, to judge the quality of teaching. Working with the teaching school, leaders have provided a comprehensive range of training for teachers to help them develop their teaching. Teachers are held accountable for the achievement of pupils within their class and pay awards are dependent on staff meeting their targets for pupils' progress.
- Pupils' progress is effectively monitored and, as a result, any pupil who is falling behind in their learning is quickly identified. Good support for individuals is put into place to help them quickly catch up with their learning.
- The school makes good use of the pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils. They use the money to support pupils' learning: for example, by providing one-to-one support and small group teaching. The school ensures that disadvantaged pupils have access to educational visits and provides emotional support through learning mentors and counsellors.
- As a result of the well-targeted support they receive, the progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is improving. They are now making good progress from their individual starting points. There is a governor who is assigned to monitor the use of the pupil premium funding. All governors receive detailed evaluations on the effectiveness of the spending on the progress of disadvantaged pupils.
- The number of pupils for whom English is an additional language is increasing. School leaders ensure that these pupils receive targeted support from well-qualified adults. As a result they make good progress from their starting point.
- The school makes good use of the sports funding it receives. The money is used to improve the skills of teachers, employ specialist sports coaches, run after-school clubs and buy sports equipment. The pupils take part in sporting competitions and have the opportunity to access sports such as tag rugby and fencing. The number of pupils taking part in lunchtime and after-school sporting activities has increased.
- Pupils study a range of subjects as part of their curriculum. The 'creative curriculum' allows them to study subjects such as history, geography and science through topics. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 study continents and countries through their Eurovision topic while those in Years 1 and 2 study science and technology through the topic of inventions.
- Good provision is made for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through the curriculum. They learn about other cultures and religions through religious education, and each half term they place the focus on a different value such as peace. They learn to understand what the values mean and are encouraged to demonstrate these in their learning and attitude. Pupils have access to a number of after-school activities which are well attended. Pupils enjoy the curriculum trips and visits provided.
- Leadership of the early years is good because the leader has a comprehensive understanding of the early years curriculum and uses assessment effectively to plan children's learning. She has introduced changes which have improved the progress of the children.
- Staff and parents are positive about the leadership of the school. Staff unanimously agree that the school

ensures that its pupils are safe.

- Subject leaders have taken actions to address areas of weakness. They know their staff, pupils and parents well. Senior leaders and subject leaders recognise that, in order to secure further improvements in teaching and outcomes for pupils, they need to develop the systems already in place and ensure that these are consistently implemented.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - knows the strengths and weaknesses of the school well and holds the headteacher and other leaders to account
 - understands the data relating to pupils' progress and the performance of different groups of pupils
 - is well informed on how additional funding is used
 - ensures that performance management is effective in rewarding good teaching and in reducing poor performance
 - checks that pupils are safe, and that the curriculum is broad and balanced and prepares pupils for life in modern Britain.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. Most teaching is consistently good.
- Almost all teachers plan work that sustains pupils' interest. For example, a group of Key Stage 2 pupils were extremely proud of their ability to hold a conversation in French. They were very excited and keen to demonstrate this in front of their classmates.
- The standard of assessment has also improved and is having a positive impact on improving the quality of pupils' work. This is marked regularly and pupils are given good guidance on what they need to do in order to improve. Most teachers extend pupils' learning by giving them 'now try this' activities to deepen their understanding and knowledge.
- Teachers effectively monitor the progress of pupils in lessons and effectively question pupils to test their understanding. Most teachers are skilful at asking questions that make pupils think deeply about their learning.
- Teaching assistants effectively support pupils with their learning so that they make good progress.
- Teachers regularly set homework which supports the learning within the classroom.
- Reading is taught well. Pupils read daily and most pupils enjoy reading. They have the opportunity to develop their skills as they read a range of different types of books.
- Mathematics teaching is good as pupils have the opportunity to practise their basic numeracy skills in class and through home learning tasks. Their mathematical skills are deepened through problem-solving activities and using mathematics in other subjects.
- The teaching of writing is improving, strengthened by pupils developing their writing in a wide variety of subjects. The school has adopted a new approach to teaching writing. This is having a positive impact on improving the quality of pupils' work and the standard of their handwriting. However, there are occasions when some teachers are not making sure that all pupils take enough care with their punctuation, grammar and handwriting. Pupils' ability to spell accurately has improved as almost all teachers ensure that pupils correct the mistakes they make in their work.
- While teachers plan activities that are initially well matched to the specific learning needs of most groups of pupils, they do not always set work that is demanding enough in order to accelerate pupils' progress, especially the more-able pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare **is good**

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe is good. Pupils told inspectors they feel safe in school and that the school teaches them to be safe in a variety of situations, including when using technology and outside the school.

- Most parents who expressed a view feel that their child is safe at school, and the vast majority believe their child is well looked after in school.
- Pupils clearly understand the difference between bullying and falling out. Pupils told the inspectors that bullying of any kind is rare: 'If someone is doing something you don't like and you say stop doing that, then they do.' If bullying does happen, pupils are very confident that staff will deal with it. The school's incident records support this.
- Pupils say they are supported if they have a disagreement with their friends. They explained that it was important to learn to deal with friendship problems. They explained: 'You need to be able to do this when you are older if you are going to have friends.'
- Pupils who need support with issues that can make it difficult for them to learn or socialise are effectively supported in school through working with mentors or a counsellor.
- Pupils learn the importance of values such as tolerance, understanding, honesty and courage through their curriculum. They told inspectors that these values will help them to be 'better adults'.
- As a result of effective action and work with families, school attendance is improving. It is now close to the national average.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils play well together. They show respect and consideration for one another in the playground, dining room and in corridors. Inspectors saw many examples of pupils helping one another.
- Pupils are respectful and considerate towards adults.
- Pupils talk enthusiastically about their learning and enjoy their lessons. Most pupils take care to produce high-quality work. However, in some lessons where teachers are less vigilant, a few pupils fail to take enough care with their handwriting
- Pupils try hard in lessons and sustain their efforts to complete tasks. They listen carefully to their teachers and follow instructions. However, a few pupils can lose interest in their work if it is not hard enough, and as a result become 'chatty'. On most occasions, pupils quickly get back to work when spoken to by their teacher.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

Most children start the Reception Year with knowledge and skills typical for their age. As a result of good teaching in a stimulating environment, children make good progress from their starting points. Most children reach a good level of development by the end of the year and are well prepared for Year 1.

Pupils continue to make good progress in Key Stage 1. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected levels at the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics is in line with schools nationally.

- An above-average proportion of pupils join the school midway through the school year, many speaking little or no English. These pupils are well supported and as a result they are making good progress from their starting point.
- Current attainment seen in pupils' books, in lessons and listening to pupils read, is rising in all subjects. Pupils are given the opportunity to solve mathematical problems and use their mathematics skills in other subjects. They told inspectors they enjoy mathematics.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 screening check in phonics (letters and the sounds they make) continues to improve. It has been above average for the last three years. Key Stage 1 pupils read well because they use their phonics skills to read unfamiliar words. Throughout the school, those at risk of falling behind with their reading are swiftly identified and, as a result of highly effective support, soon catch up and become confident readers.
- Pupils read daily both in school and at home. Older pupils in Key Stage 2 read fluently, confidently and with expression. They talk with enthusiasm about their enjoyment of books and reading.
- Although writing remains the weakest of the three subjects, work in pupils' books illustrates that standards are improving. The new writing strategy adopted by the school is improving pupils' writing skills across a range of subjects. Inspectors saw evidence of improved spelling, and use of vocabulary and grammar, compared with the previous year. This was particularly evident in Key Stage 2.
- The school's current tracking of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs shows that these pupils are making good progress. This is because they receive support that is targeted to meet their specific needs.

- Compared with other pupils nationally, there was no gap between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in reading at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2014; in mathematics and writing, it was approximately four months. When compared with other pupils in the school, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils was less than four months in reading and writing and approximately six months in mathematics. School attainment data suggest that this gap has closed further during the last school year. In Key Stage 2, the gap continues to close as there is no difference in the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their classmates in reading and mathematics; in writing it is approximately four months.
- The most-able pupils generally make good progress. However, they are not always making accelerated progress because, like other pupils, in some lessons the work they are given is too easy and does not allow them to deepen their knowledge or apply their skills and understanding to solve problems.

Early years provision

is good

- Provision is good because adults know all the children well, even though at the time of the inspection some had only been in the setting for a few days. This is because staff communicate effectively with parents who are involved in the initial assessments of their child.
- Adults create a safe, nurturing environment for the children. They listen to the children, and respond appropriately and praise the children for every achievement. Children are excited and engaged about the activities because these are well matched to their stage of development and experience.
- Teaching in the Reception class is good because the teacher uses the records of what children know and can do to plan creative activities that sustain the interest of the children. For example, children thoroughly enjoyed going outside to hit different materials with drumsticks and describing the sounds they made. Additional adults effectively support the learning of children.
- The emotional and physical health, safety and well-being of the children are promoted through a good balance of activities. Children are well behaved and cooperate with one another and adults. They have a good understanding of right and wrong. Adults act as good role models.
- The school uses the additional funding to support disadvantaged children highly effectively. They provide additional adults to support the children and, as a result, the children make good progress and reach a good level of development by the end of Reception.
- Children are developing good learning behaviours. They immediately respond to adults' requests and know the classroom routines. They show high levels of concentration when working and are eager to answer and ask questions.

School details

Unique reference number	109499
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10001940

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	180
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Watts
Headteacher	Susan Penglase
Telephone number	01582 662232
Website	www.watlinglower.org.uk
Email address	s.penglase@cbc.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–27 September 2013

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are from a White British background and few speak English as an additional language. However, the proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are increasing.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, and children 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.
- Provision in the early years is full time.
- Mobility is high. In recent years, the proportion of pupils leaving or joining the school midyear has increased.
- Since the previous inspection there have been several staffing changes, including a new Chair of the Governing Body and literacy subject leader.
- The school merged with Watling Forest Club nursery in September 2015 and now provides education for children aged from two to nine years of age.
- The school is part of the Priory Partnership for Learning. This group of schools works together to ensure high standards of learning, teaching and leadership in the partner schools. The school has received support from the headteacher of Lark Rise Academy, who is also a National Leader of Education.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited 14 lessons and made several shorter visits to classes to observe learning. Members of the senior leadership team joined the inspectors for four of the observations. The inspectors also looked at work in pupils' books in lessons and conducted a work scrutiny to look at pupils' progress in the last academic year. Inspectors listened to two groups of pupils read and talked to them about their reading. An inspector visited one assembly.
- A formal discussion was held with a group of pupils, along with informal conversations with others at break and lunchtime.
- A range of documents were examined, including the school's analysis of its own work and its improvement plan, information on pupils' academic progress, and documents relating to the quality of teaching, staff training, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, the early years leader, subject leaders, three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector took account of the 43 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and the schools' own parental survey. The inspectors spoke to a number of parents informally at the start and end of the school day.
- The inspector received and considered the views of the 23 staff who completed questionnaires.

Inspection team

Caroline Parry, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Simon Harbrow

Ofsted Inspector

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