

Stonehill School

Western Close, Letchworth Garden City SG6 4SZ

Inspection dates

1–2 December 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The school has suffered a period of turbulence in staffing. As a result, teaching is not yet uniformly good, particularly where teachers are absent for sustained periods of time.
- Progress for pupils in Year 6 has not been rapid enough and the attainment of too many remains below the standard expected.
- Progress in writing is not improving in line with the improvements in progress in reading.
- Given the weaknesses senior leaders are aware of and are working to address, their evaluation of the school is overly generous.
- Middle leaders are not all having equally good impact on improving the quality of teaching.
- In the early years, teachers underestimate what some children can do when they join the school and what children are able to achieve.
- There are too few interesting activities to help children learn in the early years outdoor area.
- Behaviour is not consistently good because staff do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop self-discipline. Some teachers do not reinforce what is expected of pupils' behaviour at Stonehill school regularly enough.
- Teachers do not always use assessment information well enough to ensure lessons meet all pupils' needs, especially the most able.

The school has the following strengths

- Progress in reading and mathematics for pupils in Years 1 to 5 has improved and the majority of these pupils are attaining the standard expected for their age.
- Teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics has improved. This has been effective in improving teaching in this subject, and pupils' progress is improving.
- Support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, including that provided by teaching assistants, is carefully planned and provided sensitively to meet pupils' needs.
- The progress of pupils who are disadvantaged is carefully tracked throughout the school and the money provided to support these pupils is well used so that the gap between these pupils' achievement and that of others is narrowing.
- Leaders' actions to improve attendance have been effective and pupils' attendance is now above the national average.
- Governors hold leaders to account. They are realistic about the challenges the school faces regarding staffing and are determined to overcome these.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good across the school by ensuring that:
 - assessment information is used more effectively to plan lessons in all subjects which meet pupils' needs
 - teachers check pupils' learning in lessons regularly and move pupils on quickly when it is clear that they are ready
 - feedback to pupils focuses on improvement rather than just correction
 - pupils are given better opportunities to apply their reading skills to writing in Key Stage 1 and to extend their writing skills further in Key Stage 2
 - more engaging and challenging texts are used in English to support learning and to inspire pupils.

- Further improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning through:
 - ensuring that adults set consistent expectations of behaviour in all lessons and around the school
 - providing greater opportunities for pupils to develop their social skills
 - ensuring that more lessons engage and enthuse pupils so that they concentrate fully.

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - actions taken by leaders to improve the school are more rapidly implemented so that more pupils in year 6 achieve the standard expected of them by 2016, particularly in writing
 - there is consistently high-quality teaching, including when teachers are absent
 - middle leaders share best practice so that all subjects are equally well led and that pupils' performance improves
 - leaders' evaluation of the school's performance is more realistic.

- Improve provision in the early years by:
 - ensuring accuracy of assessments of children when they join the school and increasing teachers' expectations of what children can achieve
 - ensuring that all staff help children understand what is expected of them in their learning and behaviour throughout the day
 - creating a more purposeful learning environment outdoors.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- The school has suffered a period of turbulence since the last inspection in October 2013. The secure leadership team now in place has brought stability to the school. Leaders have taken actions which are showing signs of improving the quality of teaching. However, teaching is not uniformly good. This is particularly the case where teachers are absent and cover teachers are not supported well enough to ensure that pupils continue to receive a good standard of education.
- Leaders' evaluation of the school is overly generous. Nevertheless, they do recognise the areas where the school needs to improve further, as shown in improvement plans and subject leader plans.
- The impact of middle leaders in improving the quality of teaching, and learning is uneven. For example, the subject leader for mathematics has had a positive impact on improving teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics. However, in other subjects such as English, leadership is not as strong, and expertise among teachers is not being shared sufficiently.
- The pupil premium funding is used effectively. Leaders thoroughly track the progress of those pupils who are disadvantaged, and the gap between their achievement and that of others is narrowing.
- Staff who completed the Ofsted questionnaire are positive about the leadership of the headteacher. Staff have confidence in leaders and feel well supported.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are catered for well. The leader responsible for their provision has a very good knowledge of these pupils and their needs, and plans meticulously to address them. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively and support these pupils well. Parents spoken to during the inspection, who have children with special educational needs, spoke highly of the support the school provides for their children.
- A broad curriculum is in place and where topic work is interesting, pupils talk enthusiastically about their learning. For example, pupils in Year 1 enjoyed their work about wind turbines and were able to recall their learning with real enjoyment. Trips, such as to the Duxford airfield, and visitors, such as an Olympic athlete, are well used to enhance learning. Pupils benefit from a range of after-school sporting clubs and the sports premium has been used effectively to increase pupils' participation in sports competitions. However, there are not enough extra-curricular activities for those pupils who have other interests, such as art and music.
- The school runs a breakfast club, which provides those pupils who use it with an enjoyable start to the day. Here, pupils enjoy a healthy breakfast before playing board games and chatting with each other and with adults, so that they start the day with a positive attitude.
- Attendance has improved and is now above the national average. This is because actions taken, such as employing a parent support worker and following up all absences very rigorously, have been successful.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development well. Pupils understand right from wrong. The school's work to promote the understanding of values is developing pupils' ability to reflect on their own and others' values and beliefs. Pupils show a good understanding of different cultures. As a result, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body have good systems in place to enable them to support and challenge school leaders. They are a visible presence in the school and closely question leaders about the progress that pupils are making. Governors recognise the progress that the school has made following a considerable period of turbulence with no substantive headteacher and are determined to ensure the school continues to improve.
 - Governors use information about pupils' progress and teachers' performance to make decisions about pay awards, challenging increases in salary where they feel they are not justified.
 - Governors closely track expenditure, including money provided to support disadvantaged pupils, and evaluate its impact.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school carries out careful checks on staff employed by the school. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities with regard to safeguarding and child protection. Records relating to child protection cases are very thorough and the school follows up any concerns rigorously. The school liaises well with external agencies to ensure that pupils are kept safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **requires improvement**

- Teachers do not consistently use assessment information to plan lessons which challenge pupils. Pupils are sometimes needlessly given tasks which are too easy and last too long. For example, in a Year 2 lesson, pupils were all completing the same task, which was writing instructions. One pupil finished very quickly and was not given any extension activity and so sat doing little while others finished. Some lessons taught by temporary teachers are slow paced because teachers try to read and understand plans while teaching them at the same time. This is because they have received insufficient support prior to ensure they fully understand the plans provided. In these lessons, pupils become restless because instructions are not clear, they have to wait too long and teaching is not challenging them to learn new facts or skills.
- Where lessons capture pupils' enthusiasm, progress and learning are good. However, some lessons lack spark and so pupils lose interest and do not concentrate enough. Texts used to stimulate pupils' writing are often not sufficiently interesting and lack the depth needed to challenge pupils' thinking and deepen their understanding. School leaders have recognised this and plans are in place to improve the quality of class texts.
- Teachers do not always provided stimulating opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in writing within literacy lessons and other subjects. The school's recent focus on improving pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar is not showing demonstrable impact.
- The teaching of early reading skills has improved since the time of the last inspection. In Key Stage 1, the school uses a structured approach to the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make). Sessions are effective, particularly those run by staff, such as teaching assistants who are very familiar with the programme. In these sessions, pupils enjoy practising reading and writing sounds and words. However, opportunities to help pupils improve their handwriting during these sessions are sometimes missed.
- There are good opportunities available to develop pupils' literacy and mathematic skills within subjects that they say they enjoy, such as topic, science and art. However, these are not always used as effectively as they could be to harness pupils' enthusiasm or to enable them to practise and apply the literacy and numeracy skills to their literacy and numeracy work.
- The good questioning practice of some teachers is not shared and, therefore, not consistently apparent across the school. Examples of probing questions being used effectively were seen during the inspection. For example, in Year 6, pupils were asked to apply what they had learned in relation to squares to identify the algebraic formula for the perimeter of a pentagon.
- Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to pupils' learning, when supporting both individuals and groups. They have positive relationships with pupils and support them well. They explain and model tasks well when pupils are having difficulty.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare **requires improvement**

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Some pupils in Years 3 and 4 reported that some bullying takes place at the school, but that the school deals with it effectively. A small but significant minority of parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire disagreed that the school deals effectively with bullying. School behaviour logs demonstrate that there have been a number of incidents, which have been addressed by school staff.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including online. They talked knowledgably with inspectors about the work that the school has done with them to raise awareness of the dangers of drugs and the effect peer pressure could have on their decisions.
- The family support worker provides good support for families who have difficulties; she is building positive bridges with these families to support pupils in their learning.
- Pupils understand how to stay healthy and members of the school council are in the process of promoting healthy eating through setting up a 'healthy tuck shop'.
- The needs of those pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs are provided for well. Extra help is planned carefully and delivered sensitively. For example, pupils who have mental health needs have additional provision, which supports them well, and the school uses the services of an art therapist to support pupils with emotional needs.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Leaders have introduced a clear behaviour policy with rewards and sanctions which are understood by pupils. The majority respond to this well, for example, by stopping and listening when a teacher raises their hand in class. However, a small number of pupils are not fully meeting the school's expectations of behaviour.
- Teachers do not all consistently apply the school's behaviour policy. For example, in a few lessons pupils call out or talk when the teacher is talking, and this is not addressed by the teacher.
- At playtimes, some pupils engage in rough play. This sometimes results in pupils getting injured because pupils are not taking enough care of others around them and adults do not always intervene quickly enough. Pupils behave well at playtimes when they are closely supervised but have not been helped to develop sufficient self-discipline to behave well all the time.
- Pupils are able to listen to each other when talking in pairs but not enough opportunities are given for pupils to develop their social skills further. For example, some pupils find it difficult to listen to each other when talking in groups because they are keen to put forward their own views, so everyone speaks at the same time.
- Respectful attitudes are evident between adults and pupils. Where lessons are engaging, pupils consistently behave well. However, in less engaging lessons, pupils become restless over time and do not concentrate fully on their learning.
- The school has dealt well with the small number of pupils with very challenging behaviour, and has worked effectively with local authority behaviour services to train staff in behaviour management techniques.
- Attendance has improved and is now above the national average. The school has worked successfully to put in place measures to ensure that pupils come to school, and these have been effective. For example, the breakfast club has helped to improve the attendance of specific pupils who had poor attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- The period of turbulence in staffing experienced by the school resulted in pupils making less progress than they are capable of. As the school has achieved greater stability, progress has improved and the majority of pupils in Years 1 to 5 are now working at the standard expected for their age in reading and mathematics. However, progress for pupils in Year 6 in these subjects has not been rapid enough for them to catch up and too many remain below the standard expected, particularly in writing.
- Children enter the school with skills typical for their age and make steady progress in the early years, but too few, boys in particular, leave the Reception Year above what is typical for their age. This is because teachers underestimate what some children can do when they join the school and what they are capable of achieving by the time they move into Year 1.
- Pupils' early reading skills are improving. The programme used by the school to teach phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) has been effective in improving the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check, which is now above the national average. By the end of Key Stage 1, the vast majority of pupils now reach the standard expected for their age in reading, with some who exceed this.
- Pupils' progress in writing has not improved in line with that of reading. Pupils are not applying their good knowledge of sounds and letters to their writing in Key Stage 1, and writing in Key Stage 2 is hampered by pupils' weak spelling and grammar.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have improved, particularly in reading, because of the good start pupils are given in reading in Key Stage 1. However, there are still too few achieving higher levels in writing and mathematics. This is because the most-able pupils are not always given work which is challenging enough and which requires them to deepen their thinking.
- The picture of improving progress in reading and mathematics in most year groups is not reflected in other subjects because lessons do not cater for pupils' differing needs sufficiently well. In particular, the most-able pupils are not challenged sufficiently in subjects such as science. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress in most year groups because their needs are clearly identified and they are well supported to complete tasks which challenge them to achieve well.
- Leaders' actions to improve the progress of those pupils who are disadvantaged are working well; the gap between these pupils' achievement and that of others is narrowing.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- The majority of children enter the school with skills typical for their age, as reflected in children's learning journeys. However, teachers' expectations for what children can achieve by the time they move into Year 1 are not high enough for all children.
- By the end of the Reception Year the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is improving and is now slightly above national levels. However, too few children, particularly boys, leave at a standard above that typical for their age. Children's learning journeys record their progress over time but some areas of learning are not focused on in enough detail. Assessments in learning journeys are not specific enough and so adults do not know clearly how to plan the most appropriate activities for each child to move their learning on.
- Activities in the outdoor area do not always promote effective learning. A range of activities are provided but these are not planned carefully enough to develop the specific gaps in children's skills and understanding.
- Activities in classrooms are more engaging, for example children were enjoying the 'winter wonderland' in one Reception class and were role playing with great enthusiasm. These engaging activities provided within the classes give more opportunities for children to develop their skills and their creativity.
- Where expectations are made clear to children, they engage with tasks well, but children are not given regular enough guidance about what they should do to ensure that good habits and good behaviour are instilled for all children.
- Procedures for keeping pupils safe are well established. Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are effective.
- Adults have positive relationships with pupils and intervene in their play appropriately to help them learn. For example, a teaching assistant was helping pupils build a grotto and talking to pupils about the size and shape that it should be.
- The local authority adviser is providing support to the early years leader to develop more consistent practice and improve the quality of provision. This work is developing and its impact is yet to be clearly evident.
- Disabled children and those who have special educational needs are supported well in the early years. Adults have clear plans in place and cater for these children well to ensure that their needs are met.

School details

Unique reference number	117345
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10001917

This inspection 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	231
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Millar
Headteacher	Elaine Close
Telephone number	01462 620262
Website	www.stonehill.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@stonehill.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24–25 October 2013

Information about this school

- The school is an averaged size primary school.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for the pupil premium (which is the additional government funding used to support pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority) is above the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- The school provides a breakfast club, which is managed by the governing body.
- In 2015, the school met the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons in all classes, assembly, playtimes and lunchtimes. Some joint observations were carried out with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' books, school assessment information, the headteacher's evaluation of teaching and learning and a range of school documents.
- Inspectors met with senior and middle leaders, with a selection of parents in the playground and with some pupils from Years 3, 4, 5 and 6.
- Inspectors heard a small number of pupils read.
- Inspectors met with a representative from the local authority and with three members of the governing body.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff, arrangements for e-safety (keeping children safe online when using electronic media) and risk assessments undertaken for educational visits.
- The views of 21 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account as were 23 staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Maria Curry, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kim Hall	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard Spencer	Seconded Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email 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, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

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, further education and skills, 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.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2015

