

Peartree Primary School

Peartree Lane, Welwyn Garden City AL7 3XW

Inspection dates 11–12 February 2016

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

- Peartree Primary has improved rapidly because the headteacher, other school leaders and governors have successfully tackled the school's shortcomings.
- The skilled and knowledgeable governors understand their roles very well. They are never satisfied, continually looking for ways to improve their effectiveness. The governing body challenges leaders to achieve the best possible outcomes for pupils.
- The quality of teaching is now good. From low starting points, pupils make good progress.
- Teachers form an effective team. The approach taken is consistent. Pupils know what to expect in lessons, and what is expected of them.
- Pupils are enthusiastic in lessons. They try their best and enjoy their work.
- Pupils' behaviour is good because they practise the school's values in their daily lives. They are polite and proud of their school.
- Attendance is much improved. Pupils say they feel safe and well looked after in school.
- The broad curriculum provides good learning opportunities.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively.
- Teaching and learning in the early years is good. Children progress well and enter Year 1 with the skills they need to be successful learners.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Tasks are not always difficult enough to challenge the most-able pupils.
- Teachers do not develop pupils' punctuation and grammar skills as effectively as other writing skills.
- Pupils have insufficient opportunities to plan and carry out their own science investigations.
- Many subject leaders are new to their roles so their skills in checking on the quality of teaching and how well pupils are achieving are as yet limited.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - pitching work for the most-able pupils at the correct level of difficulty
 - providing pupils with sufficient opportunities to practise and improve their writing skills
 - more effectively helping pupils to improve the accuracy of their use of punctuation and grammar
 - in science, better promoting pupils' ability to plan and investigate.
- Strengthen leadership and management by developing the skills of newly appointed subject leaders so that they are more effective in promoting even better achievement and teaching.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher, ably supported by a strong leadership team, has established a clear vision for the school that is shared by other staff, parents and governors. Together they have successfully tackled the areas for improvement outlined in the previous inspection report.
- The strong ethos, clearly embedded in the school values, is the bedrock upon which significant improvements, including in the quality of teaching and learning, and pupils' behaviour, are based.
- Senior leaders and governors regularly monitor the work of the school. They use this information well to focus on the areas essential for rapid improvement.
- Senior leaders' actions have a strong impact on the provision for different groups of pupils, such as those new to the school, those with special educational needs, and those who are disadvantaged.
- Staff quickly get to know the relatively high proportion of pupils who join during the year, so that these pupils settle quickly and thrive.
- Leaders' clear arrangements for checking on the quality of teaching accurately identify how teaching can improve. Staff benefit from training tailored to their needs, identified by rigorous performance management. Consequently, leaders ensure a high level of consistency in the quality of teaching.
- Subject leaders demonstrate good knowledge and understanding in their subjects. Their plans for improvement are good. They have the potential to be effective leaders, but as yet most are still gaining experience in checking on how good teaching is and how pupils are doing in their subjects.
- Staff make a significant contribution to the wider life of the school. They work closely together and the role of the school in the community is growing.
- The curriculum is well planned and lessons effectively incorporate a wide range of enrichment activities, such as drumming and cookery. Regular visits and visitors embellish learning. Clubs, too, contribute to the breadth of learning activities. However, the curriculum plan does not state that pupils should have regular opportunities to plan and conduct scientific investigations.
- Pupils' preparation for life in modern Britain is good because the school's values, such as 'respect', fully incorporate British values. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding because they practise these values in the daily life of the school. Discussions with visiting politicians help them understand 'democracy'.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Pupils show respect for people of all backgrounds, and empathy with those new to the school and area. Pupils' responses to the questionnaire show that the school encourages them to respect people and treat them equally.
- Leaders target the use of the pupil premium funding very effectively. The high proportion of disadvantaged pupils thrive because staff strive to fully meet their academic, personal, social and emotional needs. Pupils benefit from extra high-quality help carefully tailored to their needs.
- Primary schools sports funding is used well. Pupils enjoy sharpening their techniques and staff develop new skills. Activities provide opportunities for pupils to participate in a range of different sports and to represent the school in competitive games. Fitness lessons support events such as 'healthy living week', when pupils learn life skills such as how to make a healthy packed lunch.
- The school works effectively with other local schools. Staff from an outstanding nursery school helped to improve the early years provision. Pupils visit secondary schools for activities, using specialist facilities, and secondary school pupils help run sports day.
- The school benefits from expertise provided by the local authority, particularly to eradicate the areas of weakness highlighted by the previous inspection report.
- Most parents understand, support and appreciate the reasons for changes, particularly so that their children make good progress and that bullying has been tackled.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors, many of whom are relatively new, work very closely with the headteacher and staff. They help maintain the rapid impetus of improvement and provide a good education for all pupils.
 - Governors' relentless desire to improve, and their very high expectations of themselves, lie at the heart of their effectiveness. They are very open to outside expertise and recognise the important part played by the local authority and a national leader of governance.
 - Governors visit regularly, working together to better understand the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The expertise of individual members is used very effectively. For example, those with

thorough knowledge of assessment information check that pupils do well, and question and challenge leaders whenever any do not.

- Governors manage the performance of staff, including teachers, rigorously. Decisions and pay increases are based on a good range of evidence.
- Oversight of the school's finances, including the use of additional funding, is thorough. Again, governors' expertise is used effectively. With the headteacher they check value for money closely.
- Under the excellent leadership of the Chair, the governing body manages itself very efficiently. Everyone's role is clear and meetings focus on providing good-quality education.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff, including those new to the school, fully understand the comprehensive policy and clear procedures. They are well informed and training in how to keep pupils safe is up to date. As a result the school is a safe place for pupils and staff.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching is good throughout the school. Information, such as the senior leaders' regular and rigorous checks of teaching, shows that it has improved since the previous inspection. Teachers respond very positively to advice and feedback; they are reflective, always looking to improve and ambitious for pupils.
- Since the previous inspection, all but one teacher is new. Staff quickly built an ethos of teamwork and collaboration, sharing ideas and learning from each other.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge means they are able to recognise and address any misconceptions by pupils quickly, so time in lessons is used effectively. Pupils' responses to the questionnaire confirm that teachers make sure all pupils understand what they teach.
- Pupils understand the structure of lessons, that they include challenges with different levels of difficulty. They look out for these and know what to do. If they understand they choose a harder task, if they are not so sure an easier one, knowing they can always move to harder work once they are clear. As a result, their understanding of themselves as learners and of their level of achievement is good and improving.
- Reading in general and phonics in particular (the link between letters and the sounds they make) are taught well. Staff reinforce the use of phonics in other subjects. All staff teach and then practise the same method with pupils, which enhances their understanding. Other reading skills, such as inference, are also taught effectively.
- Daily sessions have increased pupils' skills in spelling. Teachers regularly check spelling when marking writing in any subject. However, the focus on teaching grammar and punctuation skills is not as strong, nor do teachers guide pupils in these aspects as thoroughly through their marking.
- Mathematics is taught well. Staff are clear how calculation, for example, is taught at Peartree. Vocabulary specific to the subject is taught effectively. As a result, pupils' understanding is built well.
- Teachers' good understanding of information about pupils' prior learning ensures lessons are generally pitched at the right level; neither too hard nor too easy. This information is also used to identify gaps in pupils' learning. Teachers adapt activities too to meet the needs of those who struggle, or are new to school. However, the most-able pupils are not always challenged by the tasks they are given.
- Pupils' workbooks are presented well because teachers have high and consistent expectations. Pupils' handwriting is neat and work generally set out clearly.
- Pupils told inspectors that their teachers' marking is very helpful to them, particularly that they are given time to read it and respond to show they have understood.
- Pupils also said they enjoy the homework tasks they are given, because they can answer the questions set in the way they think is best. They like that some tasks mean their family can help them, too.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. About eight in every 10 parents responding to the online questionnaire, Parent View, feel their children are happy in school and making good progress because they are well taught.
- Pupils value the opportunities they have to help to choose the school's values, which promotes their sense of ownership. Staff refer to values regularly in lessons and around the school, and celebrate them

in assemblies. Values are always referred to in the positive. Staff never describe a value or behaviour that a pupil is not exhibiting, and this is key to the positive impact made on the school's culture.

- Pupils make worthwhile contributions to their learning by giving their opinions about what does, and does not, help them learn. In this way, they are given a voice in shaping their own success. Members of the school council helped shape the school's direction, interviewing the headteacher, and giving their views to governors. All pupils responding to the questionnaire stated that the school encourages them to be independent and to take on responsibilities.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school. They are confident that adults in school will listen if they are worried. They say there is little bullying, and if there is it is dealt with quickly. They know how to keep safe in a range of situations, including when using the internet. Good use is made of visitors, such as the fire brigade, to explain how to stay safe.
- Pupils from different classes regularly share books with one another, and the eldest say they are pleased to help those younger than themselves with their reading.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The majority of parents who responded to Parent View agreed. Those parents spoken to during the inspection often remarked on the improvements since the current headteacher took up post.
- Pupils also told inspectors that behaviour had improved greatly since the headteacher arrived and that they are able to get more done in lessons now because interruptions are rare.
- Pupils are courteous and polite. They are proud of themselves, their workbooks and their school. They generally have good attitudes to learning, say that they enjoy the good teaching they receive and find the work they are given interesting. One who travels a long way to school said, 'this is my second home'.
- Pupils move around the school, and in and out at breaktimes, in an orderly fashion, responding quickly to the instructions of staff.
- As a result of the school's strong focus on tackling pupils' absence, attendance has improved significantly and is now close to the national average. The daily breakfast club contributes to good punctuality.
- The small number of pupils who struggle to manage their own behaviour receive very good support from staff, who are skilled at de-escalating situations and calming pupils. Staff work very closely with specialist agencies to benefit pupils and their families.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils' achievement has improved since the previous inspection because of good teaching and more appropriate learning activities. For example, the teaching of phonics uses an approach that suits pupils who quickly become familiar with the structure of lessons and methods used. Consequently, the proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the expected level in their knowledge of phonics is improving and was close to the national average in 2015. Inspection evidence suggests this improving trend will continue in 2016.
- Pupils' workbooks, and the school's checks on progress, show that pupils currently in the school make good progress from their differing starting points. This is for many reasons: good teaching, real-life and relevant activities, and pupils' own interest in learning.
- The school's checks on progress show that pupils who attend Peartree for three or more years generally attain higher standards. This is because they benefit over a longer period of time from the good-quality teaching. For example, those in the Year 6 class that left in July 2015 all made at least the expected rate of progress from Year 2, and many exceeded this; in reading a quarter, in writing a third and in mathematics half.
- While the relatively large group of pupils at Peartree for a shorter period of time also make good progress from their starting points, they do not necessarily have sufficient time to raise their attainment to meet the expected standards by the end of Year 6.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress and generally achieve well. Extra help fully meets their needs and they demonstrate a strong work ethic.
- The higher than average proportion of disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their various starting points because they receive extra help matched closely to areas they struggle in. Those currently in the school make as good, or at times better, progress than their classmates.

- The progress of pupils with special educational needs or disability is good. Staff know these pupils very well. Meetings between parents, their child and teachers, when pupils articulate their views of themselves as learners, give a real insight into each pupil and gives them a powerful voice in shaping their own education.
- The progress of other pupils who need to catch up is good because they, too, benefit from being able to select work that suits them. Over time, many are building knowledge of themselves as learners and beginning to challenge themselves to do harder work.
- Writing standards are not yet as consistently good as those in other subjects. Skills are taught well, but pupils are given insufficient opportunities to practise them in their general writing.
- In 2015, the school met the government's floor standard for reading and exceeded that for mathematics. It fell short of the writing standard by 3%. However, pupils in the school for longer than three years all achieved or exceeded the rate of progress expected for the school to meet the standard.
- The most-able pupils are not routinely set the harder work they need and teachers do not always recognise when they understand and are ready to move on. As a result, they make the expected rate of progress rather than the faster rate of which most are capable.

Early years provision

is good

- Most children enter the Reception Year with skills and knowledge below that expected for their age. Their personal, social and emotional development is relatively strong and this helps them to settle quickly to school life. They are relatively weaker in the core skills of reading, writing and their understanding of number.
- Children's progress in the Reception Year is good and they are well prepared to continue their learning in Year 1. In 2015, two thirds reached a good level of development, a little above the national average. School checks and inspection evidence suggest that progress is similarly good this year. This is an improving picture over time.
- Children achieve well because the planning of activities is based on clear and accurate assessments of each child's needs. As a result, all groups of pupils do well, including the most able. Children's vocabulary, often limited when they join the class, is developed very well because they write stories and re-tell them aloud together. They begin to speak in sentences and will often add expression to their re-telling.
- Careful organisation of teaching and the well-planned curriculum in the early years promotes children's good achievement. Children will often return to a task started with an adult, and extend it themselves.
- Children's progress is good because a very creative approach is taken to providing them with tasks to extend and consolidate their learning. For example, children took great pleasure in creating ice sculptures, choosing places to hang them, such as in the sunshine or the shade, and predicting what might happen. Children used a good range of vocabulary to explain the changes they saw.
- Children's behaviour is good. They learn and play together well, share and take turns. They concentrate and persevere, even when activities are challenging.
- Learning journeys show good progression from the start of the year. In a wide variety of activities, children are developing early writing and number skills well.
- Leadership of the early years is very good. The leader uses her expertise in this area to very good effect, particularly through the example she sets her colleagues. She is always searching for improvements and staff and children benefit from close links to an outstanding local nursery. Due consideration is given to the well-being and safety of children, which ensures they are secure at all times.
- The setting is bright and stimulating, with numerous opportunities to support children's learning. Although the outdoor area is small and unsuitable for some tasks, staff compensate for this by good use of the school grounds.
- Transition from the various settings and the children's homes is carefully managed; staff do everything they can to ensure they know children well so they can build on their interests and see they settle quickly. Links with Year 1 are equally strong. Parents say that staff work closely with them and keep them well informed of their children's learning and progress.

School details

Unique reference number	117172
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10001915

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	175
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jess Chapman
Headteacher	Clare Herbert
Telephone number	01707 881033
Website	www.peartreeprimaryschool.co.uk
Email address	admin@peartreejmi.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–4 October 2013

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Each year group is taught in one class.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is well above average. The pupil premium is additional funding provided by the government to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. Approximately two in every five pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, and a quarter speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils with disability and those with special educational needs is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils joining and leaving the school other than at the usual time is high. Since September 2015, 24 pupils have joined, 20 pupils have left, and eight pupils joined and then left.
- In 2015, the school met the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher and all but one of the teachers are new to the school, and two are new to the profession.
- The early years provision is supported by a national leader of education, the headteacher of Ludwick Nursery School, judged outstanding at its last inspection.
- The governing body is supported by a national leader in governance.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed pupils' learning in all classrooms, some with the headteacher or other members of the leadership team. In addition, inspectors observed small groups of pupils being taught.
- The inspectors looked at work in pupils' books and listened to pupils read.
- The inspectors attended assemblies and observed pupils as they moved around the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other leaders, teachers and governors. The inspectors also spoke to representatives of the local authority.
- The inspectors met with pupils to discuss their experiences at school.
- The views of 16 parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account. The inspectors also held informal discussions with parents. The inspectors also took account of the questionnaire responses from 16 staff and 13 pupils.
- The inspectors looked at a range of school documents and information, including the school development plan, checks on the quality of teaching, curriculum plans, minutes of meetings of the governing body, and pupils' behaviour and attendance records. The inspector also looked at arrangements and records for safeguarding procedures.

Inspection team

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