

# Almond Hill Junior School

Almonds Lane, Stevenage SG1 3RP

<b>Inspection dates</b>	3–4 March 2016
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The leaders and governors provide good leadership. They are passionate about their school and ensure that almost all pupils make good progress.
- Senior leaders and governors monitor teaching and provide effective professional development for staff. Consequently, teaching is good over time.
- Teachers promote very good relationships between pupils and all adults. Teachers make sure that pupils receive guidance to help them improve their work.
- Pupils' outcomes are good. Most pupils make good progress from their starting points. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is above the national average.
- Governors have a deep understanding of the school's work. They use this knowledge well to challenge leaders effectively.
- Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils behave very well and know how to keep safe. They are happy and enjoy coming to school. As a result attendance has improved and is close to the national average.
- The school's curriculum provides pupils with exciting and varied experiences that promote their learning in a broad range of subjects, as well as their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils do well in a variety of sports. They make good use of their writing skills across the range of subjects.
- Parents are very supportive of the school and express confidence in the leadership. They are encouraged to take part in all aspects of school life.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The most-able pupils are at times given work that is too easy for them. When this happens, progress is too slow and they underachieve.
- The monitoring of pupils' outcomes is not always specific enough. Plans for improvement are sometimes too general and do not give precise enough diagnosis of what pupils need to improve upon.

## Full report

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

- Ensure that the improvement planning for pupils' outcomes is more effective by:
  - making sure that the school's plans for improvement are clear, that they identify the barriers to learning, and that they enable the school's leaders to more effectively judge the impact of actions on improving outcomes
  - implementing the identified strategies to address any underachievement.
  
- Continue to raise the rates of progress for all pupils by:
  - raising expectations of teachers of what pupils can achieve so that all pupils can extend their learning by being given appropriate opportunities, when needed, to attempt more challenging tasks.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Senior leaders and governors provide good leadership. They provide a good education for their pupils and serve their community well. They have engendered a culture which places self-belief and perseverance at the heart of the school.
- Since the last inspection, the headteacher, ably supported by the staff and dedicated governing body, has been determined to review every facet of the school and put into place the needed improvements. The excellent teamwork and commitment shown by senior leaders have inspired the new staff, who are keen to build on the progress that has already been made.
- Leaders regularly monitor pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching. They know the school well and have correctly identified the priorities for improvement. Leaders regularly track progress with governors to ensure that governors are fully aware of the measures being taken, and to ensure that there is no slippage in intended outcomes. The school's plans for improvement are clear, although they do not fully detail the desired outcomes for pupils and groups of pupils.
- Appropriate professional development is provided where any gaps are noted in teachers' skills or understanding. This has contributed to the rise in outcomes at the end of Key Stage 2 to above average in 2015.
- Leaders have established very clear systems and expectations for behaviour that are matched with extensive opportunities to celebrate and reward pupils' work and conduct. As a result, attendance to school has improved greatly.
- The curriculum is planned very carefully to ensure that it is broad and coherent. A strong focus upon the core skills of English and mathematics is enriched and complemented through enquiry projects such as 'Science Week' with a focus on electricity, in which pupils participated very well in an electricity workshop.
- An extensive range of practical activities, educational visits and visitors work to excite and engage the pupils and extend their learning beyond the classroom. Effective links with the local secondary school are used to further enrich the curriculum with the use of facilities such as drama studios and PE facilities.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is nurtured well, through both the curriculum and the wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- Leaders have applied a range of strategies and additional resources to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make progress that is similar to that of other pupils. The use of this funding is tracked carefully and additional support is directed to where it is found to be needed, for example to support improvements in mathematics, particularly arithmetic.
- The school is making good use of the additional funding for sports. A dedicated teacher has provided a range of activities which prove very popular with the pupils. The number of pupils who take part in competitive sport and extra-curricular activities is increasing and the school is very successful in its many competitions with other schools.
- The support provided to pupils who have special educational needs or disability is effective. Teachers plan well to meet their needs, providing a wide range of activities to boost their basic skills. Outcomes for these pupils have improved because their needs are tracked and leaders use associated funding, resources and strategies effectively.
- Leaders access a range of external support and partnerships to improve provision. The local authority provides a range of training and development opportunities. Staff have collaborated with a wide range of schools to inform improvements to teaching and the curriculum.
- **The governance of the school**
  - Governors have a very good understanding of the quality of education provided by the school. They know about the quality of teaching in the school because they meet with leaders and visit the school regularly. They work closely with the school's leaders at all levels to ensure that they understand and are aware of pupils' progress.
  - Governors have a good range of skills that benefit the school. They take seriously their specific responsibilities linked to particular areas of the curriculum or aspects of the school's work. Their in-depth knowledge has enabled them to drive improvement in partnership with school leaders.
  - Governors have ensured that additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is effectively spent. They regularly check how this funding and additional sports funding is supporting pupils' progress.
  - Governors have a clear understanding of the link between teachers' salary progression and pupils'

progress. Governors ensure that the headteacher's performance management and the teachers' appraisal processes are properly carried out.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed, clear and given high prominence around the school and through the website. Staff are trained and knowledgeable about the risks to pupils and how to report and act upon concerns which support the school's good arrangements to promote safety.
- Risk assessments are maintained and appropriate, and arrangements for checking the suitability of staff are thorough.
- Procedures and actions to support vulnerable pupils are coordinated and administered well, with effective liaison with other agencies and professionals in place. The school has fully implemented the government's latest guidance on the 'Prevent' duty (government advice to schools to have due regard to the need to identify signs of extremism and radicalisation).

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching over time is good. The strength of the good relationships between adults and pupils is clearly evident in all classes. Lessons are well organised and interesting. Teachers use the skills of learning support assistants effectively to support pupils. As a result, the large majority of individual pupils and groups make at least expected progress from their starting points and a good proportion make better than expected progress.
- The teaching of reading, writing and mathematics is effective. Consequently, almost all pupils make the progress expected in these subjects compared to other pupils nationally. However, there is some inconsistency in a small minority of classes where current pupils' progress is slower in mathematics and writing.
- The majority of adults have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and learning. However, where expectations are not as high, pupils make less progress than they could, particularly the most-able pupils in writing and mathematics. Leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching over time evidences that teachers plan learning that supports the needs of the majority of pupils. Some of the most-able pupils, however, say they find the work in some lessons does not challenge them enough.
- Teachers use the school's marking and feedback system well to help pupils improve or to encourage them to think carefully about their work. Pupils say this helps them and they respond well to comments made by the teachers. Books show that this is challenging pupils to be independent in their learning and is working particularly effectively in upper Key Stage 2.
- There is some good practice in teachers' use of questioning to gauge pupils' understanding. This is used well to adapt teaching, challenge some of the pupils and guide others to a better understanding. However, in some lessons, assessment information is not used well enough to match work to pupils' needs. Not all classes encourage the pupils to select the level of challenge that best suits them to achieve greater progress in their learning.
- Pupils are provided with opportunities to use the skills they learn in writing and mathematics in other areas of the curriculum, for example creating a timeline of events in history.
- Classrooms are attractive and innovative spaces, featuring a wide range of practical equipment, helpful displays and celebrations of pupils' work and achievements. Technology is also used to impressive effect in some classes. For example in a Year 5 literacy lesson, pupils showed dexterity in using their iPads, reading a challenging text while at the same time making comprehensive notes from it.
- Homework is used effectively to consolidate learning, support research for enquiry projects, and to promote independent reading. Pupils find the homework set manageable and enjoy the challenge of many of the extended tasks they undertake.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Teachers and support staff demonstrate a very strong understanding of pupils' needs and welfare. Strong, caring relationships are in evidence throughout the school. Systems for safeguarding are very thorough and leaders are determined to ensure that all pupils are well cared for and that all staff, as well as personnel from external providers, fulfil their responsibilities properly.

- All pupils feel safe at all times. They have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including using the internet. They trust adults will listen to them and will quickly take effective action to address their concerns.
- Pupils understand the different forms of bullying and agree that bullying is very rare. When pupils were asked about racial bullying, their response was emphatic: 'We don't have that here. Everyone is accepted equally.'

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils, parents and staff overwhelmingly agree that good behaviour is a strong feature of the school. In lessons, pupils are almost always well behaved, working hard independently and working cooperatively, whether in their learning pairs or in small groups. They listen attentively to their teachers, follow instructions thoughtfully and are keen to succeed. They deal well with setbacks, persevering with difficult work, asking for help if they need it, and making improvements and changes when the teacher asks. However, when work is too easy for them, some pupils lose interest, and then their concentration fades and their progress slows.
- The school's 'value of the month' promotes effective leaning behaviour and is given high prominence through weekly assemblies with the whole school.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the school and at breaktimes. Expectations from all adults are high and pupils respond politely and courteously to others.
- Pupils greatly enjoy school and this is shown in the improving attendance, which is now close to the national average.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

### **are good**

- Pupils' attainment across subjects improved in 2015 and is now good. From their starting points overall attainment rose in reading, writing and mathematics to above average. This is an improvement since the previous inspection.
- Pupils across year groups are making good progress overall as a result of effective teaching and support. In 2015 more pupils now make expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they leave the school. A minority of disadvantaged pupils did not make more than expected progress in mathematics.
- Across the school, pupils read confidently and for a range of purposes. This is supported through frequent reading and a successful focus on ensuring that the pupils develop a love of reading.
- Pupils make good progress in other subjects also. Pupils' artwork, for example, shows a good level of skill, and their work in science covers the curriculum appropriately, with investigative skills and scientific knowledge developed well.
- In current year groups, disadvantaged pupils are making strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics as a result of effective tracking and careful intervention to address any gaps in their learning.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability made good progress from their different starting points in 2015 because of rigorous support and effective teaching.
- The most able usually make good progress. Teachers generally provide the most-able pupils with a good degree of challenge but occasionally the learning is not moved on quickly enough because they are not given harder work when they have already grasped a concept.
- A full programme of visits and taster sessions gives all pupils good preparation for their transition to secondary school. Pupils are knowledgeable about the next stage of their education, and are well prepared because effective teaching equips them with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117221
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10001900

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Junior
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	225
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Nicky Clarke
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs J Lovelock
<b>Telephone number</b>	01438 233660
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.almondhill.herts.sch.uk">www.almondhill.herts.sch.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:admin@almondhill.herts.sch.uk">admin@almondhill.herts.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	10–11 October 2013

## Information about this school

- Almond Hill Junior School is an average-sized school.
- There are eight classes, with two classes in each year group.
- Most pupils come from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium (additional funding for groups such as children looked after by the local authority and pupils eligible for free school meals) is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability supported through a statement or an education, health and care plan is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of year 6.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 18 lessons, some of which were joint observations with the headteacher. In addition, inspectors made a number of shorter visits to lessons.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and senior leaders, staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and four members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors examined a range of evidence, including the school's self-evaluation and development plans, the system to track pupils' progress and policies and records relating to behaviour and attendance. They also looked at records of the monitoring of teaching by senior staff, performance management information, safeguarding documentation and samples of pupils' work.
- The team met with several groups of pupils formally, and chatted informally with many others. Inspectors observed pupils in the playground, eating lunch and in assembly, as well as around the school. Several pupils were heard reading.
- The Parent View online survey response of 115 parents was taken into account, together with the views of those who spoke to the inspectors during the school day.
- Twenty-two responses from the staff survey were also examined and recorded.

## Inspection team

Simon Harbrow, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Janet Tomkins

Ofsted Inspector

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