

Ardley Hill Primary Academy

Lowther Road, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU6 3NZ

Inspection dates

3–4 March 2016

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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders and governors do not have a robust view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This is because school information about pupils' performance is not accurate enough.
- Leaders and governors are not rigorous enough in reviewing the school's effectiveness. They do not check important documents and policies meticulously enough.
- Governors do not stringently hold school leaders to account for the performance of the school. They too readily accept information given to them.
- Indications for this first year of Year 6 show that pupils are not achieving as well as they could.
- At times, a minority of pupils choose to misbehave. This behaviour goes unchecked by adults who do not systematically reinforce positive expectations.
- The quality of the provision in early years is inconsistent. Some children do not make as much progress as they should.
- The environment in the early years requires improvement. Children's work is not celebrated, and classrooms lack vibrancy and order.
- Teachers do not have the same expectations of what pupils can achieve in reading, writing and mathematics across the school.
- Teaching assistants are not used effectively enough in classes, particularly in Key Stage 1.
- Progress of most-able pupils is not good enough. This is because they are not challenged or given enough work to help them think hard.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils is not analysed well enough. Governors do not evaluate how effectively additional funds are spent.

The school has the following strengths

- There is a very extensive range of extra-curricular activities provided each day for pupils.
- The teaching of sport and swimming is highly effective. Teachers adapt their instructions well. They ensure that pupils are given precise information to improve and practise their skills.
- Pupils are well cared for. They receive high-quality care, guidance and support.
- The provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability is a strength. The school provides a fully inclusive curriculum for these pupils.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes for pupils:
 - so that by the end of Year 6, pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics and achieve the results of which they are capable.
- Improve teaching and learning by:
 - giving precise challenges to most-able pupils so they can work hard and extend their skills
 - using accurate assessment to plan learning that deepens pupils' understanding and provides opportunities to master literacy and numeracy skills
 - providing greater opportunities for pupils to extend their writing skills throughout the curriculum.
- Improve early years by:
 - raising the quality of teaching and learning so a larger proportion achieve a good level of development and make at least good progress
 - ensuring that adults promote and model positive behaviour, establishing good foundations which children can build on
 - ensuring the environment is vibrant and purposeful for children so that they develop independence and a love of learning.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Since the last inspection the school has increased in size considerably. It is now a primary school, and recently leaders took over the management of the pre-school that operates on the same site. Currently, plans are well underway for a new unit for pupils who have special educational needs or disability. Consequently, leaders and governors have not been sharply focused on raising standards across the school, and the quality of teaching the pupils receive requires improvement.
- Self-evaluation is not robust enough. Although school leaders understand the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' achievement, they do not set precise and accurate targets that are measurable and that are communicated well enough to the school community. Improvement is not systematic and progress is inconsistent across the school.
- The headteacher has a strong and clear vision and ethos for the school. However, until recently, the senior leadership team has not been sharply focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Procedures and processes such as the monitoring of teaching and learning are in place, but leaders have lacked the accurate understanding of pupils' achievement required to drive standards further quickly enough.
- School leaders do not evaluate the impact of the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils with sufficient rigour, so that successes can be built on. Consequently, additional funds are used to provide additional support staff, but often these staff are not used effectively in classes to improve the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils well enough. Gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally start to widen by the end of Key Stage 1.
- The headteacher ensures that the school is a warm and welcoming place in which pupils can learn. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is well provided for through the promotion of school values. During the inspection, there was much evidence of pupils, waiting their turn, letting others go in front of them in the line, as they showed the value of patience.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced with many subjects linked together to make the topic interesting and exciting for the pupils. Additional visits ensure that the learning experiences are memorable. For example, visits to places such as the zoo bring the topic of animals in science to life.
- Leaders ensure that sports funding is used exceptionally well. Pupils benefit from swimming in the school's own pool, together with a wide range of sports. However, evaluation of the impact of the spending is not sufficiently analysed by leaders and governors.
- Pupils benefit from a highly extensive range of extra-curricular activities that are well attended. This is a strength of the school. Pupils are able to participate in sports, creative clubs and hobbies. They told inspectors how much they appreciate the activities provided at their school.
- Middle leaders are enthusiastic and committed to the success and achievement of pupils. They are well trained and received effective professional development to lead their subject areas well. Consequently, subjects such as art, music and sports are engaging and interesting. Pupils achieve well and often produce work of a high quality in these subjects.
- Leadership related to pupils who have special educational needs or disability is exemplary. Leaders encourage and succeed in providing a fully inclusive environment where pupils with specific and often challenging individual needs are well cared for and supported. External verification of the school's effective work with individuals supports this view.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors understand the published information the school has regarding the performance of pupils, but they do not stringently enough hold school leaders to account for improving the educational experience in the school. Consequently, the school's view of its own performance is overgenerous.
 - Safeguarding practices are in place, but governors do not check on their policies well enough. Some policies are out of date and fail to reflect the changes of expectation nationally.
 - Governors' evaluation of the impact of the pupil premium is not robust enough. There is little evidence to show that they evaluate how the money is allocated and the effectiveness of spending on pupils' achievement.
 - Governors are highly committed to the school and bring a wide range of expertise and experience to the role. However, some are new to the role and they do not have full understanding about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across different year groups and different subjects because they

too readily accept the information given to them.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff are well trained and know how to raise any concerns they have in an appropriate and timely way. The practice of staff is up to date. Records of safer recruitment are meticulous and in good order.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is variable. Not enough teaching is consistently good or better. This is because assessment is not accurate enough and teachers do not plan learning that moves pupils on swiftly. Consequently, not all groups of pupils make good progress in each year group, resulting in some pupils having too much ground to catch up by the end of Key Stage 2.
- Teachers do not question pupils sufficiently well to deepen their understanding and explore thinking. In some lessons, pupils repeat the same standard of learning rather than extend or deepen their understanding until they master a particular skill. For example, pupils' work often relies heavily on worksheets that limit the opportunities to extend and edit or redraft their writing.
- Adults often have low expectations of what pupils can achieve. In one lesson, the pupils were working with an adult on data handling in mathematics. Most-able pupils were not challenged to extend their thinking and achieve the standards of which they are capable. These pupils found the work too easy.
- The effectiveness of teaching assistants is variable across the school. They are highly effective when working on a one-to-one basis pupils who have educational needs or disability. In these cases, they use skilled questions and allow a pupil time to answer. However, in other classes teaching assistants were cutting and preparing resources during lessons or putting away equipment. They had little impact on improving the quality of the learning for pupils.
- Teachers mark books consistently and well, in line with the policy of the school. However, the feedback they give to pupils is often not the most appropriate to move a pupil on in their learning. For example, an older pupil had used very specific and technical language in a piece of writing. It demonstrated his determination to succeed and enjoyment of the topic, as he had tried hard with spelling difficult words. The feedback simply mentioned that this older pupil needed to use capital letters.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and explain learning well to pupils in lessons. Pupils listen well and are often motivated and involved. Pupils participate in sharing ideas when given the opportunity. In sports lessons teachers break down the skills, adapt the activities to suit individual needs and challenge pupils to try harder and achieve more. Swimming lessons seen were exemplary, with teachers using excellent skills to help pupils learn skills. Pupils practised and made accelerated progress as a result.
- Displays around the school show a wealth of art work that reflects the topics that the pupils are learning. In one art lesson seen, the teacher had a quality painting as a resource for pupils to follow. Pupils were able to interpret and express their skills. Their end results were appreciated by the pupils and the teacher who gave them praise and suggestions for improvement, sensitively and maturely.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils' social and emotional development is extremely well catered for. As a result, pupils enjoy school and quickly develop good relationships with other pupils and the adults who teach them. Parents say that the school provides a caring and nurturing environment. Most parents who responded to the Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school.
- The quality of the care, guidance and support, together with the strong values that underpin the school's work, ensures that the school provides highly effective spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, during the inspection, the Year 5 pupils sang the song to the headteacher that they had performed at Wembley the evening before. They were proud of their achievements and supported one another extremely well.
- Adults ensure that pupils receive appropriate instruction about keeping safe when using a range of technology and social media. Pupils told inspectors that there is no bullying at the school and they know whom to talk to if they are concerned. Parents spoken to during the inspection agree that their children are well looked after and that the school keeps them safe.

- Pupils develop their understanding of the need to care for the school environment by performing roles and taking on responsibilities. The school council and the eco chiefs meet regularly, giving their ideas and suggestions for improvement to senior leaders.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- When their teacher requests attention, pupils respond and are compliant. But during less structured times, or when the expectations are not clear and precise, too many pupils choose to be naughty. This goes unchecked by the adults. For example, during World Book Day, a few younger pupils took the opportunity to slide across the hall floor and throw their books at each other. Adults passed by without reinforcing the school's values and expectations.
- A few parents expressed concerns that at breaktime for the older pupils there are insufficient activities for them to occupy themselves. Inspectors agree. During the winter months, pupils spend breaktime on the playground. Due to a lack of activities, older pupils become too boisterous in their play, resulting in more falls and bruises.
- Pupils want to learn and respond well when lessons are engaging and challenging. In lessons such as sports, art and music, pupils are eager and achieve very well.
- Pupils are polite and respectful when encouraged by adults. But this is not reinforced and, as a result, pupils behave differently depending on who they are with. Resilience and self-discipline are not yet embedded for a minority of pupils.
- The headteacher has worked hard to improve attendance and in this he has been successful. A combination of appropriate support and challenge is given to parents so that their children attend school. Consequently, attendance is good.
- Adults have reduced the number of serious incidents that result in exclusions at the school. Positive support and expectations are given to individuals who find conforming to rules difficult. The supportive methods used by the school have been used as a model of good practice for other schools.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Pupils are articulate and have positive attitudes to learning. They are capable of producing a better standard of work than that seen by inspectors in many of the pupils' books during this inspection.
- Children enter Reception with levels of achievement that are generally typical for their age. In 2015, they left the early years with a good level of development in line with children nationally. This showed a dramatic improvement on the achievement of children in previous years. This year, the achievement of children in the early years is set to remain at nationally expected levels.
- In 2015, the proportions of Year 1 and 2 pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics check were well below the national average. The school's own evidence shows that previously pupils spent too much time revisiting previous learning before being given the opportunity to make accelerated progress. School leaders are tackling this issue, with signs of improved impact on results for this year. The proportion of pupils who catch up by the end of Year 2 has risen but is still not in line with the national expectation.
- The most-able pupils are not given enough opportunity to excel. For example, in the second term of this academic year, on the evidence of some mathematics books, older pupils who were learning about using fractions had been given insufficiently complex activities. These required inadequate thought, despite pupils having demonstrated that they could already achieve this level of work in the first term.
- This is the first year where there are Year 6 pupils at the school. Work in their books and information held by the school shows that their attainment is lower than expected for their age and ability. Progress over this year is slow. When teachers give pupils the opportunity to excel in other subjects such as the singing event where Year 5 sang at Wembley, they demonstrate that they have potential and skills far beyond their age.
- Achievement in reading has remained static and broadly average for two years at the end of Key Stage 1. Although pupils are good readers and read widely and often from a range of fiction and non-fiction books, they are not experiencing enough reading across all subject areas to develop their enjoyment of books further. As a result, the proportion of pupils who achieve the higher levels in reading is well below the national average.

- The teaching of writing requires improvement. Not enough examples were seen where pupils write at length or are encouraged to edit and redraft their work. The writing displayed on the walls from Years 5 and 6 is not of the quality expected for pupils of this age and ability.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is not analysed well enough by school leaders. Gaps start to widen with other pupils nationally in reading and writing for the levels expected at Key Stage 1. Over the last three years, the gaps at the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics have also widened. New systems for tracking pupils' progress are improving, and there are early signs that the additional targeted support is helping these pupils to make better progress.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability generally make good or even better progress from their individual starting points. Their achievement is tracked well and additional support is given to precisely meet their needs. Pupils who have very specific needs are exceptionally well catered for. School leaders ensure that staff are highly trained to challenge and support these individuals. In lessons seen, including physical education, pupils who have special educational needs or disability participated as fully as their classmates, enjoying equality and independence in their learning.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- School leaders do not have a clear enough understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the early years. Although standards are rising, children do not make enough progress from their broadly typical starting points.
- Outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage improved significantly in 2015, particularly in the areas of literacy and mathematics. Overall, the percentage of children achieving a good level of development was around the national average. These results reflect the improvements in the quality of teaching and use of assessment last year, but they do not represent good progress for the most-able children. Some children are not as well prepared for Year 1 as they could be.
- The learning environment in parts of the Reception classes appears cluttered and lacks celebration of children's work on displays. Words to help support their development of reading are placed too high and are too small for a young child to see and practise their sounds. Some of the resources are old and in need of replacement. As a result, children do not use the resources as well as they could to help them make better progress.
- The quality of children's learning journeys varies. Some children have detailed examples of their work, while others have very poor examples of unimaginative worksheets. There is little evidence of consistent quality observations in the Reception classes. This is not the same in the pre-school, where the learning journeys are vibrant and show how well the children are progressing.
- At times, adults do not reinforce the positive expectations for children's behaviour in Reception. Some children do not understand the appropriate behaviour boundaries, which results in them being naughty when the opportunity arises. Consequently, after lunch, a small minority of children take a long time to settle and time is wasted while they talk over the teacher.
- Adults in the early years have taken steps to ensure that children have a broad experience in all areas of learning. This is having a positive impact on the progress that children are making this year. Teachers have received external support and guidance to improve the outdoor provision for children. During the inspection, children were enjoying digging and carrying out roadworks.
- The provision in the pre-school is well planned and helps the children develop confidence and speaking skills. Children in the pre-school play well together. Key workers praise and reinforce the good behaviour that they wish to see. As a result, children share and take turns, using polite language with each other.

School details

Unique reference number	138209
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10010921

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	449
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julie Allen
Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge	Jonathan Smith
Telephone number	01582 667955
Website	www.ardleyhill.org.uk
Email address	ardley.hill@ardleyhill.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	4–5 October 2011

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, who are eligible for the pupil premium, is lower than average. (The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are considered looked after.)
- Most pupils have English as their first language, with a very large majority of British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is below average.
- Since the last inspection the lower school has become a primary school, catering for pupils up to the age of 11.
- In 2015, the school has taken over the management of the pre-school which operates from the same site. Flexible provision is available for children from the age of two years old.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching. This included observing learning in 32 lessons, some of which were seen jointly with senior leaders, together with a number of learning walks at different times of the day.
- The inspectors spoke with pupils, scrutinised books to take account of the work that has been done and the progress that pupils make over time.
- The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters represent) was observed.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors examined a range of documentation around safeguarding and scrutinised the single central register. The arrangements for pupils who have special educational needs or disability were also considered.
- The inspectors spoke with parents informally at the start of the school day. Parental views were gathered and analysed from 47 responses to Parent View.
- Staff views were analysed from 33 responses to the staff online questionnaire.

Inspection team

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Rebecca King	Ofsted Inspector
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