

# Commonswood Primary and Nursery School

The Commons, Welwyn Garden City AL7 4RU

<b>Inspection dates</b>	16–17 March 2016
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
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

- Commonswood has improved significantly since the previous inspection. One parent typical of many said, 'It is a very different school now.'
- The headteacher's uncompromising determination has driven significant improvements to the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.
- The school continues to develop well because the headteacher is relentless in addressing areas for improvement and knows precisely what needs to be done to secure further improvement. She is supported exceptionally well by other leaders.
- Governors are tenacious. They are ambitious for all pupils to benefit from a good education. They ask challenging questions of school leaders and hold all staff accountable for their performance.
- Since the previous inspection, pupils' achievement has improved, particularly in writing, because of more effective teaching, learning and assessment.
- Staff form a highly effective team. They have high expectations of themselves and their pupils.
- Behaviour for learning is strong; pupils are resilient learners, curious to learn more.
- Pupils behave well in lessons, around the school and in the playground.
- Pupils say they feel safe and happy at school, and that they are well cared for.
- The stimulating curriculum interests and enthuses pupils. As a result, pupils produce much high-quality work.
- Pupils' learning is enhanced by the use of specialist expertise in subjects such as physical education, French and music.
- Early years provision encourages children to be inquisitive. As a result, they thrive and make good progress. They are well prepared for Year 1.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Over time and in some year groups, provision of more challenging work and teacher questioning does not sufficiently extend the learning of the most-able pupils and this limits their progress.
- Instructions to pupils who have special educational needs or disability are sometimes not clear enough and they struggle to understand the task. On these occasions, they make limited progress.

## Full report

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

- Raise the attainment of the most-able pupils further by ensuring that:
  - teachers use suitable approaches to build on what these pupils already know in order to help them deepen their understanding
  - the activities they are given are suitably challenging.
- Improve teaching to accelerate the achievement of pupils who have special educational needs or disability by ensuring that teachers prepare these pupils fully for the tasks they give them.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Governors, staff and parents all say that the headteacher has been pivotal to the many developments introduced in the school since the previous inspection. She is rigorous and unrelenting in addressing areas for improvement. Governors, staff and parents share her ambition for the school.
- The headteacher, other school leaders and governors believe that only the best is good enough for the pupils of Commonswood. This vision is shared by staff. All staff responding to their online survey say they have a clear understanding of the goals the school aims to achieve. A culture of high expectation has been well established. As a result, pupils increasingly thrive and flourish in their learning.
- School leaders have a very clear understanding of the strengths of the school and the few remaining areas for improvement. They make regular, robust and effective checks on pupils' progress, especially the disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs or disability.
- The headteacher has been remorseless in appointing only good-quality teachers. No compromise is accepted. If recruitment fails to find good-quality teachers, no appointment is made. This single-minded determination is shared by other school leaders and governors. For example, the deputy headteacher currently has a teaching commitment, rather than compromise over quality teaching.
- Leaders' very clear arrangements for checking on the quality of teaching accurately identify how teachers and teaching assistants can improve. Staff benefit from good-quality training matched very closely to their needs, and rigorous performance management drives improvements in teaching and learning. School leaders keep a very careful track of the impact of support and are not prepared to accept anything less than high-quality teaching across the school. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved and is now consistently good or better over time. Other staff also benefit from regular appraisal.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher form a highly effective team with complementary skills. Equally effective phase leaders ensure consistency between classes and years, an improvement since the previous inspection.
- Subject leaders' excellent knowledge and understanding of the subjects they lead is used very effectively. They are given the time necessary to check for themselves the quality of teaching and standards pupils achieve. As a result, they are very well informed and make accurate recommendations for improvement.
- The provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability is led and managed highly effectively. Each individual's needs are carefully analysed and extra help provided where needed. The leader keeps a watchful eye on the impact this has on pupils' progress, and makes changes when necessary. For example, she is aware some pupils struggle in lessons because they are not clear what teachers expect of them.
- School leaders actively encourage innovation and new approaches, always looking for ways to improve the education provided. Staff respond positively, knowing they can try new ideas. For example, pupils ponder thought-provoking 'question cards' aimed at deepening their understanding of topics they study.
- The curriculum is imaginatively presented to enthuse all pupils, fuel their appetite for learning, and promote their personal and academic development. It is broad and balanced. Excellent links between subjects help make learning relevant and interesting, an improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils say they are surprised how quickly time passes, and recognise this is because they are engrossed in learning. Visits and visitors help deepen pupils' understanding. Pupils are very enthusiastic participants in the wide range of clubs.
- Pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain through the many activities that form part of the everyday life of the school. Pupils' self-confidence grows when they take on responsibility and talk to the whole school in assembly. They appreciate that staff and governors are interested in their views, and often act on them. From the moment they join the school, they start to learn values such as 'respect'.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very well promoted through the rich and diverse curriculum. For example, they drum together, create rhythms and increasingly complicated patterns, carefully staying in time by working cooperatively, listening to instructions and following them closely. They raise funds for those less fortunate than themselves, often choosing the charity themselves.

- Leaders very effectively target the use of the additional pupil premium where it is most needed. Pupils struggling academically receive good-quality extra help. Those struggling socially are nurtured effectively. Parents appreciate the practical help and advice given by the family support worker, both during term-time and holidays.
- The primary school sports funding is used effectively. Specialist teaching, staff training and many more sports and gymnastic opportunities for pupils are provided in collaboration with other local schools. Pupils participate enthusiastically and take pride in their accomplishments. They have a clear understanding of the importance of exercise to healthy living.
- The local authority supports the school well and has been instrumental in the improvements made since the previous inspection.
- The partnership with parents is strong. The vast majority of parents responding to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, would recommend the school to another parent. Parents say they like the opportunities to get involved and learn alongside their children in 'family learning sessions'.
- The very close working relationship with the independent pre-school is very beneficial. For example, pupils who struggle to get to school on time attend their breakfast club.
- **The governance of the school**
  - The governing body is a strength of the school. Governors demonstrate the same ambition and determination as senior leaders to ensure that the impetus for school improvement remains rapid.
  - Governors are exceptionally diligent in their approach to fulfilling their duties. Their work alongside the headteacher particularly has been instrumental in bringing about the significant improvements since the previous inspection.
  - Governors closely analyse the progress of pupils to ensure that they do well, and to question and challenge leaders when they do not.
  - Members of the governing body regularly visit the school to see and judge for themselves the changes they hear about from staff. They have a clear and accurate understanding of what needs to improve.
  - Governors ensure that the performance policy is applied rigorously, including for appraising the performance of the headteacher.
  - Oversight of the school's finances, including the use of additional funding, is thorough. Governors help ensure that good value for money is achieved.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school's leaders ensure that all training is up to date. The school fully complies with the latest safeguarding guidance. Governors and all school staff are highly aware of their duty to keep pupils safe. Good relationships with external agencies ensure that leaders know who to refer to should they need guidance or support. The vast majority of parents responding to Parent View expressed confidence that their children are safe at the school.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching over time is consistently good overall with some that is outstanding. Information including the school's own rigorous and regular checks on teaching, confirmed by the local authority, shows that teaching has improved since the previous inspection.
- Staff share ideas to mutual benefit. They draw on one another's expertise to improve pupils' learning. Their positive relationships ensures that feedback and advice are acted on.
- Staff exemplify the behaviour expected of pupils. Pupils respond positively to the clear rules and routines, consistently implemented by all staff. As a result, the school is an orderly community.
- Pupils learn well because teachers' good subject knowledge promotes clarity and accuracy in the lesson content, and enables teachers to clear up any misunderstandings quickly.
- Teachers assess pupils' understanding regularly. Their feedback acknowledges what has been learned, and points pupils to the next steps in their learning. Teachers, in line with the school's policy, give pupils sufficient time to review their learning, so they know where to focus their energies next.
- Teachers effectively deploy their teaching assistants to most benefit. Teaching assistants are well trained to give extra help and guidance to pupils.
- Reading is taught well. Accurate phonics teaching (the link between letters and the sounds they make) ensures that pupils are clear. Teachers give pupils every opportunity to practise and hone their skills.

- Writing is also taught effectively, an improvement since the previous inspection. School leaders invested time and money in good-quality training, so staff develop pupils' knowledge skilfully and confidently. Staff provide many varied opportunities to write in other subjects, and check that pupils know, understand and accurately apply a good range of grammar and punctuation.
- Teachers develop pupils' mathematical understanding well. Basic rules, such as those of calculation, are clearly and accurately taught, building pupils' good knowledge from year to year. Many interesting opportunities to apply these skills enable pupils to learn how to explain their reasoning.
- Effective questioning clarifies and deepens pupils' understanding. Teachers generally ask probing questions and try different approaches if pupils do not understand. Occasionally, questioning is not probing enough to challenge and extend the most able.
- Pupils' speaking and listening skills develop well as they talk about their learning. They are given many worthwhile and relevant opportunities, for example when leading assemblies.
- Teachers are generally aware of their pupils' capabilities. However, some teachers' instructions lack sufficient clarity to fully prepare pupils who have special educational needs or disability for the tasks they are given, so they struggle. In addition, some tasks for the most able do not have sufficient scope for them to take their learning further, as some tasks they are given they can already do.
- Pupils respond well to teachers' clear expectations of how work is presented. Pupils' conscientious approach, and pride in their work, are clear.
- Learning at home effectively supports school work. Whether asking pupils to prepare for future lessons, or giving extra practice of work done in class, it is integral to pupils' good progress.
- Nine in every ten parents responding to Parent View, agree that their children are well taught. All the 68 pupils responding to their online survey agree that teachers help them to do their best.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The overwhelming majority of parents responding on Parent View feel their children are happy at school. In their survey, pupils all said they enjoy school.
- Pupils' awareness of themselves as learners is good. Teachers encourage them to try. Pupils respond positively, partly because they know mistakes are accepted. One pupil told an inspector, 'We don't expect all ticks in our books; that would mean the work is too easy.'
- Pupils' strong sense of democracy is built well because they see it in action when they vote for those pupils who will represent them. They willingly accept the opportunities they have to play a part in the school community, for example as health and sports ambassadors.
- Pupils' awareness of safety is very strong because it is explained and reinforced in many of their everyday lessons and the topics they study. Their understanding of personal safety when using the internet is particularly good because it is built into so many lessons.
- Staff know their pupils well and do much to meet their differing needs. For example, pupils struggling to develop social skills are nurtured well through suitable activities to enable them to build relationships.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school. All pupils responding to their online survey agree that they feel safe in school. The vast majority of parents responding on Parent View also agree. Pupils are confident that staff will listen to them if they are worried. They say there is little bullying and it is dealt with quickly.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils generally respond very positively to the clear, no-nonsense approach, within a very caring community. Pupils learn self-awareness by moving their peg up and down the 'ladder' if their mood changes, or they feel lonely.
- The school is very inclusive and welcoming to new pupils. One pupil, recently arrived, said, 'When you are new the other children are helpful and you know you are safe everywhere.'
- Pupils know the attributes they must demonstrate in their learning. They are resilient learners, willingly accepting the challenge of hard work. In the two oldest year groups, they experience staying away from home and working as a team. They challenge themselves to try new and adventurous activities.

- Attendance overall is above average. The school checks attendance thoroughly and moves quickly when it drops so that pupils do not get into bad habits. The school is equally robust in its approach to lateness.

## Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils' achievement has improved since the previous inspection. Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching have been eradicated so pupils overall make good or better progress throughout the school. Since the previous inspection, the school has successfully focused on raising standards, particularly in writing.
- The school's checks on progress, and the quality of work in pupils' books, show that pupils currently in the school are making good progress overall in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards in these subjects are consequently rising further.
- Phonics is taught well and pupils make good progress. In 2015, the proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the expected standard was above the national average. School information and inspection evidence indicate that results this year will continue to be high. Pupils use phonics accurately in their everyday reading and writing, and develop a good understanding of how to apply it.
- Progress in writing is good and much improved since the previous inspection. Examples of high-quality writing are visible around the school, celebrating pupils' achievements and challenging others to match them. Skills learned in English lessons are practised in a wide range of writing activities in other subjects.
- Progress in mathematics is strong because a good proportion of activities given to pupils are designed to hone their reasoning skills, and their ability to choose what knowledge to apply to each different problem. A particular focus on mental agility gives Years 1 and 2 pupils a good grounding to build on.
- In several subjects, such as physical education, particularly strong subject knowledge means that teaching is very clear and precise, for example in how to improve a technique or skill. As a result, pupils learn very well in these subjects.
- The small proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language generally make good progress because they settle quickly and are given good support.
- Those disadvantaged pupils who have no special educational needs or disability do well and make progress similar to, or better than, their peers. As a result, many achieve as well as their peers, and those who do not are closing the gap.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability, including disadvantaged pupils who have special educational needs or disability, make steady progress overall from their differing starting points. However, some struggle initially in lessons when they are unsure what they are to do, or how to go about doing it.
- Through the school, the most-able pupils are not always set work that fully meets their needs. For example, some of the activities they are given are not sufficiently difficult to challenge them.
- In their strong personal development, positive attitudes to learning and improving academic standards, pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their learning.

## Early years provision

is good

- Most children enter Nursery with skills and knowledge typical for their age. A few struggle with speech, language and communication, others with their social and emotional development. They settle quickly and make good progress because each individual's needs are carefully assessed so the activities they do are closely matched to their needs and interests. This good progress continues in Reception. Over the last few years, the proportion reaching a good level of development has increased year on year. The school's checks and inspection evidence suggest that this improvement will continue this year and about three quarters will reach a good level of development, well above last year's average. As a result, children enter Year 1 well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- Children's social and emotional development is catered for well. Those struggling receive good-quality extra help and guidance tailored to their needs, so they begin to flourish.
- Well-trained staff enrich and extend children's speech, language and communication through the numerous interesting opportunities they offer children. Overall, children who have special educational needs or disability make good progress from their differing starting points.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively, particularly to provide extra adult help so these children quickly catch up with, and sometimes do better than, their classmates.

- Each day children arrive keen and eager to see what interesting activities their teachers have planned for them. They are curious and soak up knowledge, trying different activities until they figure them out.
- Children respond well to the high expectations of staff. They try their best and persevere, whether learning with an adult or pursuing their own interests. They know their targets, work hard and are very proud to 'graduate' if they reach them.
- Children behave well. They work cooperatively and will search out a special friend to play with. They understand right from wrong. They are developing an awareness of how to stay safe, and use equipment safely. At an age-appropriate level, they understand British values because staff highlight them in their everyday teaching. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
- Children achieve well because the planning of activities is based on clear and accurate assessment of each child's needs. As a result, the next activity is neither too hard nor too easy. Inside and out, children enjoy the many varied activities. Staff promote children's basic skills well. For example, every opportunity is taken to promote an understanding of number, and how letters blend together.
- Staff form an effective team. They share expertise and know their children well. Throughout the setting, staff are vigilant so that children are safe and well cared for.
- Links to the on-site independent pre-school are excellent so transfer is outstanding. Children visit on a very regular basis; staff share ideas and communicate frequently. The school loans school uniform so children can play imaginatively and get a sense of what school will be like.
- Transition to Year 1 is also smooth because children are given opportunities to get used to their new surroundings, and staff work closely together to see that each individual's needs continue to be fully catered for.
- School and parents work closely together and links are good. One parent said, 'My child comes home full of beans about his learning.' Parents are very supportive of the 'weekly (homework) challenges'.
- Leadership is highly effective. Expectations are high and the setting is constantly improving because staff are well led and encouraged to try new ideas. Checks on each child's progress ensure that no one falls behind so progress is consistently good. This partly explains the increasing proportion of children reaching or exceeding a good level of development.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117378
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10001904

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary and Nursery
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	424
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Julia Williamson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Gill Seymour
<b>Telephone number</b>	01707 880420
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.commonswood.herts.sch.uk">www.commonswood.herts.sch.uk</a>
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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	2–3 October 2013

## Information about this school

- This school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The school operates two part-time Nursery classes, one morning and one afternoon.
- Reception and Years 1 to 6 are each taught in two classes.
- The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium funding is below 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.
- Most pupils are White British, with a small proportion from a range of ethnic heritages. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is below average.
- 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.
- The Chair of the Governing Body is a local leader of governance.
- An independent pre-school operates on the school site and is inspected separately. This also offers before- and after-school care.



## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in all classrooms, some with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. In addition, inspectors observed small groups of pupils being taught.
- Inspectors looked at work in pupils' books and listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors observed pupils as they moved around the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other leaders, teachers and governors. Inspectors also spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors met with pupils to discuss their experiences at school.
- The views of 51 parents who responded to Parent View were taken into account. Inspectors also held informal discussions with parents. Inspectors also took account of the questionnaire responses from 28 members of staff.
- 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. Inspectors also looked at arrangements and records for safeguarding procedures.

## Inspection team

Robert Greatrex, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Dominic Carver	Ofsted Inspector
Terence Flitman	Ofsted Inspector

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