

# Holmwood School

Kensington Drive, Great Holm, Milton Keynes MK8 9AB

## Inspection dates

26–27 April 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 teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, how hard they should work and how well they should behave are not high enough.
- Leaders' monitoring is not always effective. Sometimes, their checks are not rigorous enough. Occasionally, leaders do not act on the insights and information these checks provide.
- Leaders and governors' actions to mitigate the impact of budgetary constraints and high staff turnover on pupils' learning have not been effective enough.
- Pupils' attainment in key stage 1 tests has declined steadily and in 2015 was significantly below average. Writing was especially weak.
- There were some wide gaps in 2015 between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others nationally and between boys and girls. Approaches to improve the achievement of boys and disadvantaged pupils are not consistently employed.
- Teachers do not set work that is sufficiently challenging, especially but not solely, for the most able.
- The school environment does not support learning well enough. The outdoor play area in the early years does not maximise opportunities for children to learn as they play.
- More improvements are still required in the early years to improve the way children are assessed and the way teachers and assistants use information from assessments to plan learning.
- Opportunities for pupils to experience social, moral, spiritual, and cultural learning and enhance their knowledge of fundamental British values are not planned systematically enough.
- Governance has developed so it is now sharper. Despite governors' endeavours, some budgetary and staffing issues remain unresolved.

### The school has the following strengths

- Some changes that have been instigated are working well. Plans for the future are mostly well-focused.
- Leaders' actions to improve pupils' attendance and their scores in the Year 1 phonics test have been successful.
- Teachers and assistants know and care for the pupils well. Parents spoken to by inspectors valued their dedication.
- Teaching assistants, mainly but not solely working in key stage 1, provide effective support.

## Full report

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

- Improve pupils' outcomes in the early years and key stage 1, by:
  - ensuring that teachers make better use of information from their assessments of pupils' work so that the tasks they set enable pupils to make the rapid progress needed to catch up, especially, but not only, in writing
  - making sure that the tasks teachers set are sufficiently demanding so most-able pupils make the rapid progress of which they are capable, especially disadvantaged most-able pupils
  - improving the quality of adult-to-child interactions in the early years so children learn as they play
  - raising the expectations teachers have of how hard pupils work, especially, but not solely, boys
  - ensuring that gaps between boys' and girls' achievement narrows, including in the early years.
  
- Improve the environment of the school so it is more supportive of pupils' learning, by:
  - ensuring that the early years outside play area provides more opportunities for children to practise their reading, writing and numeracy skills
  - reducing the noise pupils make as they work on tasks.
  
- Improve the impact leaders and governors have on improving the school by ensuring that:
  - leaders' monitoring is sufficiently rigorous, and their expectations of how well pupils behave and how hard they work are raised
  - information gathered from monitoring (including checks made on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and fundamental British values) is effectively analysed and interpreted, and any follow-up actions required are carried out in a timely manner
  - actions taken to resolve budgetary and staffing issues are effective and more emphasis is placed on successfully mitigating the impact these have on pupils' learning
  - opportunities provided by the school's federation with an outstanding infant school lead to better outcomes.

An external review of governance and the use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and governance should be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- The executive headteacher has made some changes that are effective and future plans are mostly well-focused. However, some changes are not leading to improved outcomes because leaders' checks are not rigorous enough. In addition, some barriers to pupils achieving well have not been removed. For example, the noise level while pupils complete tasks makes it hard for some pupils to concentrate.
- Leaders' expectations of pupils are not always high enough. As a result, on too many occasions, pupils are allowed to approach tasks in a dilatory fashion and on occasion tasks set for pupils are not demanding enough, especially for most-able pupils. This has meant that some pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- The actions taken by the governors and the executive headteacher to minimise the impact of staffing and budgetary issues have not been sufficiently effective. Not enough has been made of opportunities that arise through the school's federation with a local outstanding infant school.
- Leaders and governors have not properly evaluated the impact of senior leaders' broad portfolios and regular teaching commitments. As a result, the implementation of some necessary changes, such as improvements to the way incidents of poor behaviour are recorded and monitored, have been tardy.
- Subject leaders' contributions need to be developed further. Some subject leaders do not play a big enough part in monitoring and evaluating teaching, learning and assessment in the subject area for which they are responsible. Leaders have rightly identified this as a priority for improvement and have strong plans in place.
- Leaders have received training that has helped them to implement new approaches successfully, for example a new way of teaching phonics (the letters that sounds make). Some leaders need additional guidance in how best to check the impact of new approaches for all groups, including the most able, and how to follow-up their checks with further actions should they be required.
- The responsible senior leader has effectively implemented a new approach to assessing pupils' work without levels, which teachers are using with increasing confidence. More needs to be done to ensure that teachers are assessing work accurately using the new criteria. Some pupils' work, especially in writing, suggests they may not be on track to meet age-related expectations in the more challenging key stage 1 assessments, despite the school's tracking indicating that they are. New approaches are not yet fully operational in non-core subjects.
- Leaders have developed the school curriculum so it is broader and more varied. Leaders have rightly focused on ensuring that topics studied have an all-inclusive appeal. In addition, there are now well-planned opportunities for pupils to build their knowledge of history, geography, and religious education. Better use of the school's wood-lined playing fields has enhanced pupils' creative and scientific learning. However, leaders' checks to establish whether national curriculum requirements are fully met are not comprehensive enough. For example, limited opportunities for some pupils to develop their mathematical reasoning skills have led to weaker progress in this aspect of the subject.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has worked effectively with parents and external agencies to ensure that the support provided by teaching assistants is well-focused. This support has enabled pupils to strengthen their basic learning skills. However, progress made by pupils who have special educational needs or disability varies too much between subjects and year groups. Changes recently made to the way teaching assistants work with pupils are in their infancy and therefore it is too early to establish whether they are having an impact on improving outcomes for this group, although these changes have led to closer collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants.
- The school provides pupils with a range of experiences that enhance their spiritual, moral, social, and cultural (SMSC) learning. The moral and social elements of SMSC are more effectively delivered than other elements. Leaders do not have a clear enough overview of how all the elements of SMSC are threaded through the curriculum, including through displays. Consequently, some potential opportunities to promote fundamental British values, and equalities, through links to SMSC, are missed. For example, in an assembly about the need to follow school rules, no connection was made with the importance of upholding the rule of law.
- The sports premium is used effectively to fund a number of popular sports clubs and to improve teachers' skills. However, the impact of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils has been variable. Additional support is underway but has not yet led to consistent improvements for targeted pupils, especially in writing.

- The local authority has supported the executive headteacher well in implementing some operational aspects of her role, including the robust management of teachers' performance. Representatives have also conducted reviews of the school, which have identified some helpful next steps for leaders. However, not enough support has been provided to leaders and governors on how best to mitigate the impact of staffing issues and budgetary constraints.
- **The governance of the school**
  - Governance has improved but is not yet good because despite governors' efforts to resolve budgetary and staffing issues, too many decisions are influenced by these constraints.
  - There have been a number of changes to governance, including a new chair of the governing body. The new chair has high aspirations for pupils' success, and is ambitious to improve the quality of pupils' education and outcomes, especially for disadvantaged pupils. Governors have challenged leaders to do more to close the gaps that remain between the achievement of this group and others nationally. However, actions taken to achieve this worthwhile aim have not yet led to consistent improvements.
  - Governors' actions to obtain a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school have been effective and include regular visits to see the school at work. They have also requested the school's leaders to provide written and verbal reports which are scrutinised at committee meetings. Therefore, although some staffing issues remain unresolved, governors have a clear overview of how effective teaching is. They are rightly satisfied that, following improvements, leaders manage teachers' performance robustly.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Strong systems are in place for recording incidents and record-keeping is detailed. Good use is made of links with parents and outside agencies, as appropriate, to ensure the best possible care for all pupils. Where necessary, the school has successfully asked the local authority to provide further assistance and guidance.
- The executive headteacher has worked with leaders to ensure that understanding how to keep safe is emphasised as part of pupils' learning. Issues such as staying safe when online, including the risk of being groomed when online, are explored well. The staff have received initial training in their 'Prevent' duty. There are strong plans in place for further training to help staff ensure that pupils are kept safe from the dangers of radicalisation. Pupils say they feel safe and know how to stay safe.
- The school successfully supports pupils, including those for whom English is not their first language, in learning how to express their concerns and manage their emotions. Some pupils with additional needs receive play therapies and all pupils regularly visit the 'kaleidoscope' multi-sensory room. Leaders' monitoring of the impact of its work to keep children safe through this approach, and some other approaches instigated following training, is underdeveloped.

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

- There have been some improvements in teaching but they are not consistent across all subjects and year groups, including the early years.
- Leaders' monitoring of agreed new teaching approaches is not always rigorous enough and sometimes changes that need to be made to ensure new approaches lead to better outcomes are not implemented quickly enough.
- Although some teachers have started to make better use of information from their assessment of pupils' work when they plan learning, this practice is not bedded in. As a result, some tasks unnecessarily require pupils to repeat knowledge, skills, and understanding that they already have. For example, the most-able pupils in Year 1 were required to cut up definitions of punctuation then match them to full stops and commas. Some pupils' work indicated that they were already using full stops and commas correctly in their writing so this task did not help this group of pupils to make progress.
- In some classes, including in the early years, teachers' expectations of how seriously pupils should take the work they set for them are too low. In addition, in some classes where the week's teaching is shared between two teachers, there is disparity between the expectations the teachers have of pupils, including how neatly pupils are required to write. As a result, some pupils do not make the strong progress they need to catch up.

- Teachers' questioning is too variable. While in some classes teachers use questions to probe pupils' knowledge and understanding well, in others teachers pose questions that are not demanding enough. In addition, when pupils provide the wrong answers teachers do not always provide follow-up questions to enable pupils to learn from their mistakes or deduce the right answer.
- Some changes have led to better teaching and some pupils' progress is improving as a result, including improvements in the way teaching assistants support pupils. However, leaders' monitoring of new approaches does not always probe deeply enough. For example, while in mathematics pupils have the opportunity to become fluent through practising a topic before moving on, there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop mathematical reasoning.
- The new programme for teaching pupils to read led to improvements in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in phonics in 2015. This year, a substantial proportion of pupils have moved on from learning phonics to learning spelling. However, this aspect of the programme is not taught as effectively as reading. The level of challenge is too low and the pace too slow. Opportunities are missed to link and apply spelling rules. Some most-able pupils do not, therefore, make the rapid progress of which they are capable.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare** require improvement

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement. Leaders have initiated new approaches designed to help pupils to take more responsibility for their own actions. However, these are in their early stages and, as a result, many pupils are not able to regulate their own behaviour. On some occasions, pupils make too much noise while working, talk to each other while the teacher talks, visit the toilet too frequently and play when they should be working.
- Leaders have rightly focused on improving pupils' attitudes to learning. However, they have not checked whether the changes they make are suitable for all pupils. For example, in order to help pupils stay focused, some classes run around the playing field between lessons. This approach is not targeted enough so pupils who are already working hard miss valuable learning time.
- In a number of classes, pupils have more than one teacher. Some books indicate that pupils' pride in their work and presentation is not consistent enough between teachers.
- Most pupils relate well to one another and play harmoniously. More needs to be done in the early years setting and in key stage 1 to help pupils who find it difficult to interact positively with their peers during unstructured times. The games some pupils play do not support them well enough in gaining important social skills such as cooperating and collaborating. The support older pupils give to younger ones while they play is underdeveloped.

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. When teachers and teaching assistants enforce high standards of behaviour, pupils behave sensibly. However, there are occasions when teachers fail to insist that pupils' conduct is sensible and appropriate. This leads to inconsistencies in pupils' behaviour.
- Inconsistencies in the way behaviour is managed have been compounded by staffing turbulence. A number of pupils spoken to during the inspection said that some pupils were silly in some lessons and while most parents praised the school, some mentioned the impact of the high turnover of staff on pupils' behaviour.
- Leaders and teachers' actions to improve behaviour and attendance have had mixed success. Actions to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence have worked well. Some approaches to improving behaviour have worked better than others. Leaders have not monitored the impact of actions taken, including the additional support provided for individual pupils, thoroughly enough. As a result, leaders' understanding of what works best is not precise enough. It is hampered by the fact that the recording of low-level disruption in lessons is not systematic enough.
- Leaders are sensibly gathering information about pupils' behaviour from a range of sources, including pupil questionnaires and behaviour records. Well-kept records of bullying incidents indicate that there are very few occurrences. However, some responses to the school's own questionnaires indicate that a number of pupils perceive that other pupils treat them unkindly. Leaders have not analysed and evaluated all the evidence they have to establish a clear enough overview of how well pupils treat each other.
- Pupils told inspectors they feel safe and responses from pupil questionnaires undertaken during the inspection were positive about safety, as were parents' responses on safety. Pupils' sense of security and well-being is enhanced through 'check-ins' at the start of each day, when teachers ask pupils to share any issues that might be of concern. Pupils behave well at the after-school club, which is effectively managed.

## Outcomes for pupils

## require improvement

- Pupils join the early years with skills and levels of development that are lower than might be expected for their age, according to the school's own assessments. The school's information shows that pupils make progress from these starting points. However, in 2015 pupils did not make enough progress to meet national averages in key stage 1 tests and pupils' attainment was significantly below average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- There has been a declining trend in the proportion of pupils achieving the national average in key stage 1 assessments over the last three years. Not enough has been done to stem this decline.
- Most-able, disadvantaged pupils do not achieve as highly as others do nationally. Consequently, in 2015 gaps widened between the proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving level 3 in both writing and mathematics tests when compared to others nationally. Although the gap narrowed slightly in reading, it remained too wide.
- In 2015, there was a decline in the proportion of pupils achieving level 3 in key stage 1 tests and assessments, when compared with 2014. Pupils identified as most able in current Years 1 and 2 are not always given the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and understanding through the tasks they are set or the questions they are asked. Consequently, some of the work in most-able pupils' books, despite showing potential, does not exceed the more challenging age-related expectations of the new national curriculum.
- The school has provided additional help for disadvantaged pupils in class, which has been more effective in mathematics and reading than writing. As a result, gaps between the proportions of disadvantaged pupils achieving level 2, compared with others nationally narrowed in 2015 in reading, and mathematics but remained too wide in writing.
- In 2015, the gap widened between the attainment of pupils for whom English is not the first language and others, especially in writing. The school has implemented new approaches to improve pupils' language skills, such as pupils discussing answers to questions with their partners. These are not always successful because teachers do not carefully check the impact of the approach on pupils' achievement. For example, when pupils talk in pairs, some teachers do not listen closely enough to what pupils are saying and therefore cannot assess whether their spoken language skills are improving.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and how hard they should work are sometimes too low, especially, but not solely, for boys' writing. As a result, some pupils do not make the rapid progress needed to catch up from low starting points.
- The school has successfully improved the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check and results rose significantly in 2015. However, there was a wide gap between boys' achievement and girls'.
- Pupils' current progress is variable, especially the progress made by those who have special educational needs or disability. Pupils' work and the standards they reach in lessons show that there have been some improvements in progress. However, despite this being a focus for the school, pupils generally make slower progress in writing. Some gaps remain between the progress of disadvantaged pupils when compared with others and the progress that boys make compared with girls.
- Low expectations have meant some pupils do not catch up from low starting points and, consequently, a number of pupils leave the school without being well enough prepared for the challenges of key stage 2.

## Early years provision

## requires improvement

- In 2015, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development at age five was higher than in 2014 and just above average. However, wide gaps between boys' and girls' attainment remained, especially in writing and speaking.
- Leaders with responsibility for the early years do not have a clear enough overview of strengths and weaknesses in provision. This includes ensuring that baseline assessments of children's starting points and other assessments of their learning are sufficiently useful, detailed and accurate. Consequently, plans for developing the provision further are not sharp enough, although there is a sensible focus on improving outcomes for both boys and disadvantaged children.

- Many children join the early years having been assessed at their pre-school. Staff reassess children on entry. Often, these assessments of children's development and learning are lower than the pre-schools'. Leaders do not check these discrepancies carefully enough.
- Some teachers and teaching assistants have expectations of what pupils can learn and achieve through play activities that are too low. Activities on offer outside, and sometimes indoors, do not provide enough opportunities for children to develop their communication, reading and writing skills as part of their play. This means some pupils are not well enough prepared for Year 1.
- Staff are being trained in new approaches in interacting with children's play to help in their development and acquisition of skills. Leaders are not, however, monitoring rigorously enough whether new approaches are working, especially for boys and disadvantaged children. As a result, they have not picked up inconsistencies in practice. For example, some teaching assistants missed opportunities to target boys and model the language of comparison when they were playing with cars, trucks and diggers.
- Children's work shows that a wide range of learning activities are planned for children, including participating in whole-school phonics (the sounds that letters make) sessions. In the main, adult-led activities help children to learn effectively. This is because staff have usually thought more about what they want children to learn and encourage them to think about what they are doing.
- Children are safe in the early years and parents value the way staff care for the children. Partnership between staff and parents is effective. As with the rest of the school, the environment is noisy. This means that some children, especially boys, need adult support in order to stay focused.
- Children identified as having additional, speech, language and communication needs access well-thought-out interventions, including some play therapies.



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	110392
<b>Local authority</b>	Milton Keynes
<b>Inspection number</b>	10001379

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Infant
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–7
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	179
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body board
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Nick Jeffery
<b>Executive headteacher</b>	Mrs Claire Sharples
<b>Telephone number</b>	01908 260596
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.holmwoodschool.com">www.holmwoodschool.com</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:office@holmwoodschool.co.uk">office@holmwoodschool.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	16–17 May 2011

## Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized school. It is an open plan school with some shared classroom spaces.
- The school is part of a 'hard' federation with a local infant school, Ashbrook School. The federation is called 'The Bridge'. The two schools share a governing body and executive headteacher.
- The after-school club is situated at Ashbrook School.
- About half of the pupils are White British with the rest coming from a wide range of other ethnic heritages. For just under one third of pupils, English is not their first language.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability supported by the school is below average. The proportion with a statement or education, health and care plan is above average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are supported by pupil premium funding is well below average. The pupil premium is extra government funding to support the education of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and children who are looked after by the local authority.



## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning during lessons in each class. Shorter visits were made to observe the teaching of phonics, and to see the after-school provision. Pupils were also observed in assembly, at breaktimes and around the school and heard to read during a guided reading session.
- An inspector met formally with a group of pupils. The team spoke to many other pupils informally.
- Inspectors examined a variety of documentation related to the school's improvement plans, evaluations of its own work, pupils' progress and how the school keeps pupils safe.
- The team held meetings with members of staff, leaders and with several members of the governing body. They also met parents informally at the start of the school day. An inspector also met with a representative of the local authority.
- The team took note of 24 replies to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and the 30 responses to the pupil questionnaire. The results of 27 returns from a survey of staff opinion were considered.

## Inspection team

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Kathryn Hobbs

Susan Cox

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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