

Wharton CofE Primary School

Greville Drive, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 3EP

Inspection dates	6–7 July 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Strong, steely and resilient leadership from the headteacher has turned the fortunes of Wharton Primary around. Swift, fundamental change means almost every aspect of the school is better than at the previous inspection.
- Other senior leaders, including members of the governing body, are standing shoulder to shoulder with the headteacher. They are equally relentless in rooting out weak practice and driving improvements to teaching.
- Subject leaders are highly effective. Their positive influence has equipped teachers with the skills, subject knowledge and confidence to teach well across a range of different subjects.
- The lively, well-planned curriculum is the backbone to recent improvements. It is underpinning the strong teaching pupils across the school benefit from each day.
- Pupils achieve well in subjects beyond English and mathematics. They gain the skills and knowledge to succeed in different areas of learning.
- The pastoral care for pupils is second to none. Whatever their need, individual pupils benefit from nurturing relationships and effective support to help them thrive. Consequently, achievement gaps between groups are closing quickly.
- Children are thriving in the early years. They are well prepared to meet the demands of Year 1.
- Pupils enter school happily, and end the day with a smile on their face, because they feel safe, enjoy their learning and know their views are valued.
- Pupils are fiercely loyal and immensely proud of their school. Their appreciation of recent changes shines through their positive attitudes to learning and their good behaviour.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils' outcomes, although improving strongly, are not yet good. Older pupils are living with gaps in their learning from weak teaching in the past.
- Some pupils make slower progress because teachers do not take enough notice of gaps in previous learning.
- Too many pupils are missing large chunks of time from school.
- Even though disadvantaged pupils are making faster progress, the standards they reach as not as high as other pupils.
- The teaching of some mathematical ideas lack sufficient depth.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on recent improvements so that pupils' achievement, especially in mathematics and English, is consistently good or better by:
 - tackling the gaps in older pupils' learning so that they can reach the standards expected for their age
 - ensuring that teachers pay greater attention to pupils' starting points when planning activities so that deficiencies in basic skills are tackled swiftly
 - helping teachers to plan and teach mathematical ideas in sufficient depth so that pupils have a solid platform on which to build when they meet these topics again
 - providing pupils with greater opportunities to practise their writing skills when they are studying other subjects
 - helping disadvantaged pupils to make swifter progress so that their attainment matches that of other pupils in school and nationally
 - reducing the amount of time some pupils miss from school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Wharton has been on a rocky and challenging journey since the last inspection. In rooting out endemic weaknesses, and dealing with staff turnaround, leaders have sometimes had to go backwards before establishing new ways of working. However, their perseverance has paid off; Wharton has turned the corner. Almost every aspect of school life is the best it has been for a long while.
- The positive work of all leaders is evident in every corner of the building and beyond the school gates. Teaching is now good, pupils' positive behaviour enables them to learn well and their achievement is rising rapidly. Consequently, pupils are happy, safe and emerging as well-rounded youngsters who are flourishing socially and emotionally.
- 'Passionate' is the word that consistently springs to mind to describe leaders, governors and staff at this warm and welcoming school. The absolute commitment of one and all to ensuring that pupils get the best out of their primary education is an invisible cord which binds everyone together.
- The headteacher is at the heart of this united school family. Her high expectations, calm manner and complete dedication to the pupils of Wharton form the cornerstone of recent improvements. She has given staff the time, skills and support to do their jobs well. Staff are buoyant. They are flushed with recent success, hungry for more and excited about the next stage of the school's journey.
- All leaders play their part. Everyone knows their role and all are making a difference to improving teaching and pupils' achievement. In particular, the work of subject leaders, a weakness at the last inspection, is now a considerable strength. In fact, leaders from other schools across the region are now visiting Wharton to learn from the good practice in place.
- Clear systems for checking teaching and managing the performance of staff underpin recent improvements. Staff know what they need to do to develop their practice. They are supported well in this quest through effective and frequent training opportunities.
- Pupil premium funding is used well to support disadvantaged pupils, regardless of their ability. Leaders know exactly which pupils attract this additional funding. The needs of each individual, including those who are more able, are considered carefully and matched to an extensive menu of support. Consequently, this group are now making the same progress as others in the school.
- Pupils' enjoyment of, and participation in, physical activities is a result of the effective use of the primary school physical education and sports premium. A wide range of physical activities are on offer, during, before and after the school day. Pupils can take part in the usual sports at a competitive level. They can also get a taste of new sports, such as fencing or Brazilian dance.
- The quality of care and support for individuals and their families is very strong. Skilled adults employed by the school or brought in from external services ensure that pupils' needs are catered for well. For example, pupils who may be facing challenging times can access support in the calming nurture rooms or through play therapy. This is helping pupils to build their social skills and the emotional resilience to succeed. Barriers to learning are being overcome and all pupils have an equal chance to thrive.
- The curriculum at Wharton is a success story. It has been pivotal in bringing about rapid improvement. The learning opportunities on offer have completely turned around pupils' desire to learn and their behaviour during lessons. The main reason for this triumph is the influence pupils have on the design and delivery of the curriculum. In listening to pupils' honest views, leaders completely reviewed the school day and the strategies for teaching different subjects. As a result, all subjects carry equal weight. All are planned and taught well across the school.
- The breadth of the curriculum captivates pupils' interest and allows everyone to shine. A whole host of enrichment activities, such as outdoor learning, trips and visitors to the school, are broadening pupils' experiences. This work, underpinned by Christian values, is promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well. Activities such as the street party to celebrate the Queen's recent birthday mean that British values feature highly in pupils' learning.
- Leaders seek advice, take note of guidance and take immediate action to tackle shortcomings. The effective support from local authority and diocesan officers has made a meaningful contribution to the school's success. This close work has been especially useful in helping leaders and teachers to make sure their information on pupils' progress is accurate.
- **The governance of the school**
 - A timely external review of governance has reinvigorated governors, refocused their attention and set

them on the right track to fulfil their roles well. Governors now work differently. They know the expertise that resides within the group and use this to best effect. Their meetings and committee structures have been reshaped to make sure everyone has an informed and accurate view of the school. Consequently, governors know how well the school is faring and what more needs to be done.

- Effective training means that governors are up to speed with information about pupils’ progress and teaching. They are holding leaders to account and asking the right questions. They have a good awareness of how teachers’ performance is managed and follow agreed policies closely when deciding on pay awards.
- Governors know the difference additional funding is making to the achievement of disadvantaged and pupils’ physical well-being.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Timely and appropriate training means that all staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge to raise concerns about pupils’ well-being and safety. Record keeping is detailed. This shows any matters referred to leaders or the local authority are followed through diligently.
- Much has been achieved at Wharton in a relatively short space of time. Effective action planning, and strong leadership capacity, is setting the school on the right track for an even brighter future.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Good-quality training, alongside teachers’ enthusiasm to be the best, accounts for the improved teaching in the school. Without exception, new and established teachers are embracing change and doing their utmost to lift their skills. Whole-school approaches to teaching reading, writing and mathematics are followed in each classroom. This means pupils are no longer facing an uneven journey as they move year groups.
- Teachers’ good subject knowledge across a range of subjects means they teach confidently. They plan well-structured lessons and use resources effectively to support pupils’ thinking as well as making learning interesting. Teachers foster pupils’ positive attitudes and good behaviour through their warm and friendly manner.
- Vibrant displays across the school, plus the quality of work in pupils’ books, tell a good story of the teaching pupils benefit from each day. The teaching of subjects other than English and mathematics is particularly strong. Interesting contexts, underpinned by a focus on subject specific skills and knowledge, mean that teachers are helping pupils to become proficient across the whole of the primary curriculum.
- The teaching of reading, especially phonics (letters and the sounds that they make), is effective. It paves the way for younger pupils to become competent readers. Teachers ensure that they cover all aspects of the mathematics national curriculum. They are increasingly skilled in exploiting opportunities to develop pupils’ numeracy skills across other subjects.
- Gaps in pupils’ learning, especially for those who did not reach age-related expectations in the previous year, are not tackled relentlessly enough. This means that teaching can sometimes miss the mark and activities are too difficult for those pupils who lag behind.
- In contrast, teachers’ higher expectations of what pupils can achieve are helping to lift the achievement of the most able pupils. For example, gifted writers are producing high-quality work which shows real verve and style. Teachers ensure that these pupils have the technical ability to play with words, punctuation and sentence structure.
- Teaching assistants, especially those adults who work closely with pupils who have specific needs, are supporting pupils’ learning well.
- Teachers follow the marking policy and are helping pupils to learn from their mistakes. Pupils are increasingly able to review their own work and to make changes for the better.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school’s work to promote pupils’ personal development and welfare is good. This aspect of pupils’ development carries equal weighting to pupils’ academic success.
- Pupils have a real voice in this school. Many of the new strategies, which are now bearing fruit, are a

direct result of pupils' influence. Pupils told leaders what was wrong with teaching and why the activities they faced each day failed to ignite their desire to learn. This led to far-reaching changes. Consequently, pupils feel involved, valued and appreciate all that happens to make their time at school productive and memorable.

- High-quality support means that individuals are nurtured. Pupils gain the emotional resilience, confidence and social skills to face challenging situations and to become successful learners. Pupils take their different responsibilities seriously, whether supporting someone who needs a friend, or representing the school at town council meetings.
- Pupils are increasingly aware of how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. They know how to avoid danger when using the internet, and the pitfalls of smoking, taking drugs and drinking alcohol. A session led by a national charity is helping older pupils understand the risks of sexual grooming.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are a credit to the school. They are repaying leaders' trust through their positive attitudes to learning and their good behaviour in classrooms and around the building.
- Pupils pay attention and get on with their tasks cheerfully. They work and play together well. This was especially marked in Year 6 when the two classes were brought together for the day. Despite being with different classmates, these pupils felt safe enough to share their worries about moving school. They were equally adept in offering advice to each other to close down concerns. Such mature attitudes are setting these pupils up well to make a positive start when they begin Year 7.
- Pupils themselves say behaviour is typically good. Staff and most parents agree. School records show a marked improvement in behaviour over time. There are few incidents of poor behaviour. Exclusion from school is non-existent; in the past, incidents of exclusion were above average.
- Pupils feel safe and free from bullying. They trust adults to respond to their concerns. Records show incidents of bullying have reduced. Pupils who need extra help with their learning are not worried about being teased. Similarly, the most able pupils know their success will be applauded and not used as a tool to single them out in the playground.
- Pupils' attendance is broadly average. Nevertheless, there is a small group of pupils who spend too much time away from school.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- In the past, pupils have not had the best deal at Wharton. Inaccurate assessments, staff upheaval and weaker teaching have all taken their toll. Too many pupils did not have the skills and knowledge to make the most of their time in school. The 2015 results do not paint a positive picture, especially for Year 6 pupils. Not enough pupils made the progress they should from their key stage 1 starting points in reading and mathematics. Consequently, they began secondary school with lower than average standards.
- This data, however, does not tell the full story or reflect how well pupils currently at the school are achieving. Improvements to teaching since the last inspection are making a positive difference to the academic gains for all pupils. This is particularly evident for younger pupils who have only ever experienced strong teaching. The proportion of children gaining a good level of development by the end of Reception now matches the national average. More pupils achieved success in the Year 1 phonics check and a healthy number of Year 2 pupils are working at the levels expected for their age. The foundations for successful learning are in place. This means pupils no longer have to race to catch up from the start.
- Pupils' books and the school's own assessment information show that older pupils are making rapid progress. However, some of these pupils are carrying a legacy of underachievement. Not all have the same solid base on which to build. Gaps in some pupils' understanding of number, spelling, grammar and punctuation are getting in the way of them attaining as well as they could for their age. This is the key reason pupils' outcomes are not yet good.
- A fundamental reason for the turnaround in pupils' achievement is the breadth of the curriculum. Pupils achieve well in subjects other than English and mathematics. Their books are jam-packed with quality work that shows they are gaining the skills and knowledge to develop as well-rounded youngsters.
- Pupils have a good sense of place and time because they can use a range of maps with confidence and critically evaluate historical artefacts to find out about the past. Their good knowledge of scientific ideas is complemented by their skills in carrying out investigations and drawing their own conclusions. The quality of their artwork is often quite breath-taking. The display of water lilies, in the style of Monet, is just one

example of their impressive talents. Their study of Spanish is helping to broaden pupils' experiences and give them an insight into another country.

- This work is making an enormous difference to pupils' attitudes to learning. Gone are the days when low-level behaviour got in the way of learning. Pupils are too absorbed in their work to get up to mischief. The range and nature of activities on offer means that everyone has a chance to excel, not just those pupils who find English and mathematics easier.
- Improvements are also evident in pupils' English and mathematics books. Pupils are writing for different purposes with an increasing understanding of style and structure. In mathematics, their understanding of key ideas is strengthening through opportunities to solve different types of problems. Nonetheless, pupils' knowledge of some mathematical topics, such as fractions, is not deep enough to set them up well for future learning. Moreover, some pupils are not able to put their writing skills to good use when studying other subjects.
- Improvements to pupils' phonics skills, plus a renewed focus on reading for pleasure, are helping pupils to read fluently and with confidence.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities were in the past usually lagging behind their peers. This is no longer the case. Both of these groups are making the same progress as others in the school because of the close support they receive. However, there is still a way to go to ensure that disadvantaged pupils reach the same standards as their classmates and other pupils nationally.
- Few pupils managed to exceed the expectations for their age in the past. However, the most able pupils are no longer falling behind. The school's own data shows that all of these pupils are building on their stronger starting points. Many are soaring because of the challenge they receive. In mathematics, for instance, these pupils grapple with a range of complex problems. This puts their understanding to the test and makes them think hard.

Early years provision

is good

- A large majority of children enter Reception without the skills and knowledge to make a quick start to their education. Most need extra help with their reading, writing and speaking skills to access the activities they would normally encounter for their age.
- Good-quality teaching, effective support and accurate assessment information enable children to catch up quickly. The proportion of children who gain a good level of development has increased each year. It now matches the national average. This means children are starting Year 1 ready to fly. The time children spend in the early years is helping them to emerge with a secure platform for future success. This is a marked improvement on the past, when too many children were already behind from the start.
- Children enjoy their time in Reception. They are confident learners who are willing to try their hand at whatever is on offer. They work well together, sharing resources and ideas to solve problems. For example, a small group of boys collaborated very well to make a structure larger than a metre stick. Elsewhere, children developed their speaking skills effectively when bringing their bicycles to the outside 'car wash'.
- In the past, boys and disadvantaged children lagged quite a distance behind other children. The most recent data shows both groups are beginning to catch up. This is because the activities on offer, particularly outside, interest boys as well as girls. Additional funding is used as well in Reception, as in the rest of the school, to help disadvantaged pupils thrive. Early help, from skilled adults, is helping to tackle weaknesses in children's speaking and writing skills. Disadvantaged children are faring better, although there is still a way to go for them to reach the same standards as their friends.
- Children behave well, follow routines and work safely. Their personal development is catered for well through nurturing relationships and strategies to foster their independence. The effective safeguarding arrangements within school ensure that children are safe and secure. All welfare requirements are met in full.
- Good leadership means recent change, including a temporary turnaround in staff, has been managed well. Training for staff means everyone has a clear role in supporting children's learning.
- This work also extends to forging more effective links with those nurseries that send children to Wharton. For example, recent work to share strategies for developing early reading has led to more children entering Reception with a stronger grasp of sounds and letters.
- Positive relationships with parents are developed through a monthly newsletter, celebration assemblies, and 'catch up and cake' sessions.

School details

Unique reference number	135635
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10012204

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	381
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Duncan Fitz-Gibbons
Headteacher	Mrs Claire Spinks
Telephone number	0160 6288110
Website	www.wharton.cheshire.sch.uk
Email address	admin@wharton.cheshire.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	18–19 June 2014

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- There are very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Almost all of the pupils who attend this school are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who receive support through the pupil premium funding is broadly average. The pupil premium is additional funding provided by the government for pupils who are known to be eligible for free schools meals or who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's floor standards. These are the minimum standards and rate of progress expected in reading, writing and mathematics of pupils in key stage 2.
- Almost all of the staff currently employed at the school took up post since the inspection in 2012. Since the previous inspection in 2014, there have been further changes. Three teachers have left and a number of staff have been on extended leave. Their classes have been taught by temporary teachers. The changes to staffing have settled down recently.
- The school meets the requirements for publishing information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited each classroom to observe teaching and pupils' learning.
- They observed and spoke to pupils during lessons and at play. Inspectors met formally with six groups of pupils and heard pupils read.
- Meetings were held with staff, middle leaders, members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority, the diocese and an external school improvement company.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including arrangements for safeguarding. They took account of school information about pupils' outcomes and scrutinised pupils' books.
- Inspectors spoke informally to a small group of parents at the start of the school day. They also considered the 37 responses to Parent View (the online questionnaire), including 26 free-text comments. The inspectors took account of the 25 responses to the staff questionnaire.

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