

Firs Primary School

Dreghorn Road, Castle Bromwich, Birmingham B36 8LL

Inspection dates

7–8 June 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	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' progress in key stages 1 and 2 is not consistently strong to enable them to reach the standards expected of them.
- The work that pupils are given is not always sufficiently demanding to help them achieve the best they can.
- Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to further develop their skills in writing at length and across different subjects.
- There are not enough chances for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in real-life situations.
- Teachers do not always follow the school's marking policy to ensure that pupils' work improves.
- Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching do not consistently focus closely on the progress of groups of pupils.
- Some of the improvement targets and completion times are not precise enough for leaders to check how effective their actions are.
- Attendance is below average and persistent absence is higher than that seen nationally.
- Governors do not effectively hold leaders and teachers to account for the achievement of pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- The recently appointed headteacher and the senior leadership team have identified the correct priorities to improve the school and are working hard to address them. As a result, teaching and outcomes are improving.
- Children get a good start in the early years. Good teaching and good leadership ensure that they achieve well and make good progress.
- Pupils learn well how to use phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) to help them read. Their progress in reading is often good.
- Leaders' work to promote pupils' well-being is strong. They ensure that pupils are kept safe and work closely with pupils and their families to ensure their welfare.
- The school's physical education and sports provision provide high-quality activities for pupils and supports their physical development well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils make the best possible progress by:
 - ensuring that teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are consistently high
 - setting more demanding work for all groups of pupils, including the most able, to extend their learning
 - providing pupils with more real-life problems to solve and investigate in mathematics
 - giving pupils more experience of writing at length and in different subjects so that they become more confident writers
 - ensuring that teachers enable pupils to improve their work by consistently following the school's marking policy.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - improving the monitoring of teaching, with a clear focus on how effectively individuals and groups of pupils learn and make progress
 - establishing clearer timescales and targets so the impact of the school's work can be measured more precisely to bring about more rapid improvement
 - making sure that governors gain the skills required to evaluate the performance of pupils and hold all leaders to account
 - improving attendance and reducing persistent absence so that pupils benefit from the education at school.

An external review of governance 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

- Leadership and management are not yet good. This is because the action taken to improve teaching has not yet ensured that the quality of teaching is consistently good and, as a consequence, pupils do not achieve as well as they should at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- The executive headteacher and headteacher are determined and effective leaders who have worked successfully to build a capable senior leadership team. In a relatively short time, they have established a positive culture which drives continuous improvement in all areas of school life. The school has had significant changes in staffing since the time of the last inspection. The headteacher has worked hard to reduce any negative impact on pupils' progress, and the staff work well as a team.
- Leaders at all levels are supported well in developing their roles and in how they use performance information to improve progress in each year group. Senior leaders have identified the correct priorities for improvement within the school development plan. However, some of the targets for improvement and timescales are not as sharp as they should be to ensure that the priorities for development are addressed swiftly.
- The leadership and management of teaching are improving. The leadership team now checks more regularly on the quality of teaching and cross-reference these observations with checks on pupils' work, to develop teachers' skills and improve teaching. These changes have not yet ensured that teaching is consistently good and this means that not all pupils have an equal opportunity to achieve well. Some monitoring of teaching does not take enough account of the impact of teaching on the progress of groups of pupils in lessons.
- The headteacher has strengthened systems for managing the performance of staff through regular checks on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning throughout the school. Leaders ensure that newly qualified teachers and those in the early stages of their career are well supported, helping to bring about improvements in the quality of teaching. This is successfully raising the achievement of pupils across the school.
- Work to develop and embed the new primary national curriculum is well under way. Leaders are evaluating and reshaping the curriculum so that it better meets the needs of the pupils and, in doing so, are looking for gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills. Termly topics such as 'Where do we come from?' and 'What makes the earth angry?' bring together aspects of many different subjects including music and art, and are effective in capturing pupils' interest and curiosity. Pupils enjoy the many additional activities, such as the choir and dance, and educational visits, such as the trip to Twycross Zoo that introduces pupils to a variety of animals and their habitats.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Through assemblies and teaching, the school successfully promotes values such as integrity, trust, courage and belief. Leaders ensure that any form of discrimination is not tolerated. This prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- The primary sports funding has been used very effectively to provide pupils with opportunities to take part in a wide range of sports, including gymnastics, running, rounders and dodgeball. These are proving popular with the pupils and helping them to keep fit. The school now provides a wider range of sporting opportunities and inter-school competitions. Sports coaches organise morning and afternoon playground sports such as five-a-side football and chase ball, thereby increasing pupils' participation and improving their physical well-being.
- The pupil premium grant for disadvantaged pupils is used appropriately. Each pupil is identified, their needs assessed and funds used to give additional support, as required, or assistance for educational visits and events. The school has organised an Easter club to prepare pupils for the end-of-key-stage tests. This is helping them to close the attainment gaps with their classmates.
- Parents with whom inspectors spoke were positive about the school. A number of parents took the time to complete Ofsted's online free-text survey. Typical comments include: 'With the new leadership team I believe the school, teachers and children will do great at Firs Primary School', and 'Teachers and staff go the extra miles to help the children when needed.'
- Through a service level agreement, the local authority has supported the school through the regular monitoring visits of an educational adviser. The school has drawn on a variety of other outside help and support. This includes specialist advice for the early years provision.

■ The governance of the school

- Governors are not effective enough in holding leaders and teachers to account for any weaknesses in pupils' achievement. They too readily accept senior leaders' analysis of its performance, without checking for themselves.
 - The governing body is actively engaged in the life of the school. Governors are linked to a subject or specialist activity such as safeguarding.
 - The governors bring to their roles a wide set of qualities such as professional skills and a good knowledge of the local community.
 - Governors assess their own training needs to get the best balance of skills to help the school.
 - Governors carefully monitor the extra pupil premium funding and understand how it is helping pupils to achieve better.
 - Governors ensure that leaders take action in the event that any teaching is weak.
 - Governors make sure that the school meets statutory requirements, including those for safeguarding.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Teachers' training is up to date and teachers are well informed about the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. Leaders and managers work closely with external agencies and families to ensure the safety and well-being of children. The school helps parents and carers understand the importance of adopting safe practices such as using the internet safely.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement because they are not yet consistently well matched to pupils' abilities and this results in variations in pupils' progress as they move through the school. Recent changes made by school leaders have resulted in improvement and pupils' progress is accelerating. However, teaching is not yet leading to consistently rapid progress for pupils to attain the standards expected for their age.
- Expectations are not consistently high for all groups of pupils. In some lessons, the work is not set at the right level of difficulty for pupils. When this happens, pupils' learning slows down because the work is too easy and they are ready for more demanding work, especially for the most able pupils.
- Teachers have improved their use of assessment since the last inspection. However, the school's agreed marking policy is not applied consistently in all classes to ensure that pupils improve their work. As a consequence, some pupils do not reach the standards expected for their age.
- The teaching of mathematics is improving and helping pupils to secure their basic skills. However, teaching does not provide regular opportunities for pupils to use their mathematical skills to solve practical problems.
- Pupils are developing their skills in writing in different styles. However, they do not always have enough chances to practise their skills in long pieces of written work. Pupils' skills in using grammar, punctuation and spelling correctly are improving.
- The school's emphasis on reading for pleasure ensures that pupils enjoy reading. Teachers' increased focus on the teaching of phonics is resulting in improvements in the standards of reading. A Year 1 pupil was excited to read to an inspector and explained confidently and very proudly, 'I can read my book fluently. It is about Mars, which is in space.' Another pupil read and used a range of strategies to enable her to read the more difficult words. Parents are encouraged to share books and read with their children.
- Other adults make important contributions to pupils' progress, sometimes teaching small groups and at other times providing support for individuals. For example, they provide effective support for those pupils who join the school throughout the year and pupils who speak English as an additional language, helping them to settle in quickly and catch up with the others. In a Year 2 lesson, an adult worked well with children to identify British currency and ensured that children were able to make the same total using different coins.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.

- All the pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they liked coming to school, and that they felt safe there and also when travelling to and from school. Pupils have a good understanding of the different forms bullying can take, including those relating to race and name-calling. They say that it is rare, but if they ever have any concerns, there is always an adult on hand to help them, or one of the pupil 'bully busters'.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and social media. As a result of the bike safety classes, first-aid lessons and swimming lessons that the school provides, pupils know how to keep themselves safe in other contexts. They have a keen sense of road safety.
- Pupils learn to consider their role in society and how to help those less fortunate than themselves. They help others by raising funds for charities. These events often involve making and selling items, which helps them to learn about the value of money. Pupils took part in a 'fun run' to raise money for the Birmingham Children's Hospital.
- Pupils are proud of their school and carry out responsibilities eagerly and sensibly, such as helping out as play leaders. Pupils act responsibly on the playground, where they are well supervised. Pupils from different backgrounds enjoy each other's company and play happily together.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Attendance has declined in the last year. Overall attendance remains below the average, and persistent absence remains above the average, despite the efforts made by school leaders to ensure that pupils come to school every day.
- Most pupils concentrate well in lessons and apply themselves enthusiastically to activities. When the pace of learning slows, a very few pupils lose concentration.
- Leaders keep detailed records of any incidents of poor behaviour. These show the effectiveness of the procedures for improving behaviour. The rewards and sanctions system is well understood by pupils. Pupils told inspectors that good manners and acts of kindness are recorded in the 'Golden Book', which is read out in assemblies.
- The school is effective in dealing with pupils who have behavioural difficulties. The poor behaviour of pupils has led to some fixed-term exclusions. Through the school's support and guidance, the behaviour of these pupils has improved markedly.
- The breakfast club is popular and this ensures that pupils get to school on time. It is well organised and gives pupils a nourishing start to the day as they relax, play games and complete homework tasks.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Pupils do not consistently make the progress they are capable of, so they have not achieved as well as they should at the end of key stages 1 and 2 since the last inspection. From starting points that are below those typical for pupils' age, standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6 have also been below average over time. Work in books and the school's tracking of pupils' performance show that increasing numbers of pupils are now reaching the expected standard for their age. However, pupils' progress across year groups and subjects is inconsistent. As a result, pupils' outcomes require improvement.
- The current progress of pupils across the school is variable. Pupils are making good progress in reading. The school has improved pupils' reading skills through daily guided reading activities. Pupils enjoy reading, both for pleasure and to find information. However, gaps exist between pupils' attainment compared with age-related expectations in writing and mathematics. In some classes, pupils are not making rapid enough progress, so that too many pupils work below age-related expectations.
- Activities and work provided sometimes do not stretch pupils to reach the expected standards for their age. At times, the most able pupils are presented with tasks that do not allow them to deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills. For example, in science and topics, some of the most able pupils are provided with work that is similar to that given to other pupils; this does not extend or challenge them sufficiently.
- Weaknesses in the teaching of phonics in the past have hindered pupils' progress. The results of the Year 1 phonics check were below average last year. Positive steps taken through staff training in phonics and the more effective grouping of pupils have resulted in pupils being able to use a wide range of strategies to tackle new words and read with confidence. As a consequence, pupils are making good progress.

- Pupils who have special education needs and/or disabilities are benefiting from the early identification of their individual needs and the extra help that is given quickly. As a result, the progress of these pupils is accelerating.
- Fewer disadvantaged pupils made expected progress compared with their classmates and other pupils nationally last year. Their progress and attainment are improving and gaps in attainment and progress are closing in the year groups currently in school.

Early years provision

is good

- The children entering the Nursery class have a broad span of knowledge and skills but, overall, these are lower than those typically found. Children make a positive start in the Nursery class, settling in quickly to its routines and activities. The Nursery setting is colourful and vibrant, and staff are welcoming. The children are happy and enjoy learning and exploring the many opportunities provided for them.
- Owing to effective teaching and learning and a well-resourced setting, by the end of Reception Year, children, including disadvantaged children, make good progress from their different starting points. The school's assessment information has been independently confirmed and shows that an increased proportion of children, including disadvantaged children, have achieved a good level of development this year. Children are confident, independent learners who are well prepared to move into Year 1.
- The early years provision is well led and managed, with all adults working closely together. Parents are kept informed about how well their children are doing. Parents spoken with, who have children attending the Nursery and Reception classes, were very appreciative of the staff and how they help their children to make progress both in their learning and socially.
- Staff plan the children's work well, mindful of their different ages and stages of learning, and the weak language, communication and mathematical skills with which they start school. Prompts for learning are adjusted to suit the children's level of understanding and there is a good degree of clarity about what learning is expected in each activity, indoors and out. Sometimes, however, tasks are too easy for the most able children.
- Early reading and writing skills are taught well. Children quickly learn to read and to use their phonics when reading and spelling. They use joined-up writing well as they begin to write stories, such as how to catch the 'gingerbread man', and using capital letters and full stops.
- Children begin to write numerals accurately and to record simple number sentences as they learn to count, add and subtract. They enjoy making up their own challenges in mathematics. Through doing so, they demonstrate their increasing understanding of basic mathematical concepts. However, provision for mathematics during outdoor activities is not as developed as for literacy.
- Children work and play in a safe, secure environment. Arrival and departure times are closely supervised by the staff, and the outdoor area is secure and well maintained. The ratio of adults to children is good, and the health and safety of children are ensured through the thoughtful care and attention of staff.

School details

Unique reference number	131725
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10012417

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	449
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pam Garrington
Headteacher	Fiona Aris
Telephone number	0121 464 3792
Website	http://firs.bham.sch.uk
Email address	enquiry@firs.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	20–21 May 2014

Information about this school

- This school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The large majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest of which is Pakistani heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is well above average. This is additional government funding to support pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who have special education needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- Early years provision is part time in the Nursery and full time in Reception.
- The school provides a breakfast club.
- The headteacher was appointed in April 2016, having worked part time in the school for just over a year.
- There has been major disruption to staffing, including within the senior leadership team, since the last inspection.
- The school does not meet the government's floor standards, which are the minimum standards expected nationally for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 21 lessons, seven of which were seen jointly with the headteacher and senior leaders. In addition, inspectors listened to pupils read in Years 1 and 6.
- Inspectors looked at examples of pupils' work and talked to them about their work.
- Inspectors talked to parents as they brought their children to school and examined their responses to the online questionnaire for parents. Inspectors took account of the 19 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils, the chair of the governing body, a local authority representative and school leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents, including the school's own information on pupils' current and recent progress, planning of work in different subjects, leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, and records relating to behaviour, attendance and the safeguarding of pupils.

Inspection team

Steve Nelson, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Janet Baker	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Whitcombe	Ofsted Inspector

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