

Alexandra Infants' School

Melville Road, Normacot, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST3 4PZ

Inspection dates

13–14 July 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
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 do not make good progress in key stage 1. This is particularly the case in mathematics. Pupils have too few opportunities to think hard and deeply about their mathematical work to help them achieve well.
- Teaching in key stage 1 requires improvement. Work set for pupils lacks challenge.
- Time in lessons is not used to good effect. Pupils are not moved on quickly to harder work. Some pupils lose interest in learning or are not clear about what they need to do.
- In lessons in key stage 1, some pupils do not behave well. Not all teachers manage pupils' behaviour effectively or consistently promote good behaviour.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not achieve well in key stage 1. Although they are starting to narrow, wide gaps exist between the standards of work achieved compared to that of other pupils nationally.
- Despite recent improvements, attendance remains below average. The proportion of pupils who are frequently absent is above average.
- The curriculum does not provide good opportunities for pupils to use and apply their reading, writing and mathematical skills.

The school has the following strengths

- Through their decisive and well-judged actions, senior leaders have made important improvements to the school in a short time. Teaching is improving and standards are rising.
- Children now make consistently good progress in the early years as a result of successful teaching and strong leadership. Disadvantaged children achieve very well in this key stage.
- The teaching of reading, including phonics (letters and the sounds they make), has strengthened and is effective. Pupils' reading skills are improving at a good rate.
- Effective support, well managed by the head of school, ensures that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do well.
- Governors have a clear understanding of their roles and have made a strong start in their work to improve the school's performance.
- Leaders ensure that the arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. Pupils are well cared for and feel safe.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching in key stage 1 so that it is consistently good and pupils make good progress by:
 - giving pupils more challenging tasks
 - ensuring that time in lessons is used effectively, so that pupils start their tasks promptly and are moved on to harder work as soon as they are ready for it
 - ensuring that pupils deepen their mathematical understanding by providing opportunities for them to reason, and think more deeply about their work
 - making sure that all adults consistently manage pupils' behaviour well and promote good behaviour
 - providing good opportunities for pupils to use and apply their reading, writing and mathematical skills when they complete work as part of other curriculum subjects.
- Improve attendance, particularly of Pakistani and White British pupils, so that it is at least in line with the national average, by:
 - continuing to work with parents to tackle poor attendance
 - reducing the number of pupils who are frequently absent from school.
- Accelerate the progress made by disadvantaged pupils in key stage 1, to reduce the gaps between their attainment and that of other pupils nationally.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The newly established leadership team has made crucial improvements to the school in a very short space of time. Under the experienced guidance of the acting executive headteacher, senior leaders have gained the confidence and respect of staff and built a committed team who are keen to improve their teaching, along with their wider work with the pupils and their families.
- Senior leaders have not shied away from making difficult decisions to bring about these improvements as part of their strong commitment to improving the education of their pupils. As a result, their leadership has secured important improvements to the quality of teaching, along with the attendance and the behaviour of pupils, from very weak starting points.
- Senior leaders promote high expectations and a clear view of the improvements that they want for all. Staff, likewise, feel respected and valued by senior leaders. They share the view that the school is improving. Therefore, senior leaders have set the school on a very secure footing for future improvement.
- Senior leaders have rightly focused on improving the quality of teaching. As a result, they have secured good teaching in the early years foundation stage and have removed inadequate teaching in key stage 1. The acting executive headteacher has introduced a new programme of appraisal to improve, and keep a close eye on, teachers' performance. Leaders have checked the performance of all teachers in a systematic manner, providing mostly useful and accurate feedback. Staff value the professional development that senior leaders have arranged for them. Staff are very committed to improving their teaching and respond well to the guidance provided. As a result, teaching is improving. Teachers who have recently qualified are provided with the support they need to improve their teaching.
- Leaders' plans have set a clear sense of direction for the school and have been checked carefully to see if they have brought about improvement. They have based these improvement plans on their mostly accurate view of the school's performance. The plan to reduce the wide gap between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their peers has been updated as leaders' knowledge of how these pupils are achieving has grown. As a result, the pupil premium grant is now being used with increasing effectiveness. However, the school's plans for the use of the primary school physical education and sports grant have been less successful. Leaders and governors recognise this.
- Leaders have introduced a new system to track pupils' progress. Both governors and leaders recognise that this system has limitations and has not helped them check on the pupils' progress as accurately as they would have liked. However, leaders used it effectively to identify some patterns in achievement, such as the lower attainment of disadvantaged pupils, and have started to act to narrow this wide gap. Leaders are now introducing a new system.
- Leaders have chosen wisely about selecting the right external support to help them to improve the school's effectiveness. For example, they have made good use of help provided by the local authority to improve the teaching of writing and help develop the role of middle leaders. Through an effective partnership with a local schools' collaboration, leaders have made good use of help to improve teaching, check on the accuracy of teachers' judgements about the standards, and to help recruit new staff and governors.
- Leaders have ensured that the full range of subjects are taught in a way which pupils enjoy. Pupils talked enthusiastically about the musical and theatre groups that visit. Sometimes, lessons are organised into theme days for subjects such as art. Pupils also enjoy visits to places of interest and, recently, visitors from a local animal sanctuary brought owls to the school for the pupils to see. However, the curriculum is not yet developing the pupils' skills of reading, writing and mathematics well enough for pupils to make fast progress.
- Pupils' spiritual and moral development is promoted well by the school. Pupils learn about the range of cultural backgrounds that pupils are drawn from. They also consider how a number of important religious festivals such as Eid and Christmas are celebrated, and are making links with a local church and Sikh gurdwara. Pupils have also had opportunities to raise money for the building of a local mosque. During an assembly, pupils were encouraged to reflect on how being different makes them very special. Pupils' social and moral development is less well developed. Some pupils find it difficult to behave well in lessons.
- The school promotes fundamental British values appropriately. For example, the school council is active and has voted on how it should spend some of the money that pupils have raised. Respect and tolerance of other people's faith is clearly promoted and is shown in how well pupils get on with one another.
- Senior leaders have worked hard along with all staff to create trusting and strong relationships with parents. One parent described the school as a 'family' and appreciated the recently organised Eid Festival which drew parents from a range of community groups attending the school. Parents that inspectors spoke to acknowledge that the school is improving and have much confidence in the work of staff.

- At the time of the inspection, some of the required information was missing from the school website.
- **The governance of the school**
 - A new team of governors was established in January 2016. Governors checked their own skills carefully when they started their new roles. They have ensured that they have the right skills for the job and have shared out specific responsibilities accordingly. Although very new to their roles, governors have quickly got to grips with their responsibilities. They now know how well the school is performing. They regularly question, and at times challenge, senior leaders about their work and how well the school is improving. Importantly, they strongly support senior leaders to take the necessary actions to improve the school. Governors recognise, however, that they need to check more thoroughly some aspects of the school's work, such as the effectiveness and impact of the school's use of the sport premium and pupil premium. Nevertheless, they share the same high expectations and commitment to the school as their senior leaders.
 - Governors have already given careful consideration to the school's future. They have made important decisions to sustain recent improvements and to keep on developing the school's work. For example, they have established partnerships with other schools and taken steps to ensure that school finances remain in a healthy position.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have ensured that all of the safeguarding requirements are fully in place. In response to having many new staff join the school in such a short space of time, leaders have been quick to provide a range of training. As a result, staff know what to do if they have a concern about a pupil's welfare. Staff are also quick to respond to any signs of potentially extremist attitudes. Leaders also check carefully that staff who they appoint are suitable to work in the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Due to the effective actions of leaders, teaching across the school is improving. In the early years, teaching is already consistently good and so children's learning now gets off to a good start. In key stage 1, teaching has now also improved so that there is no inadequate teaching in classes or in subjects. However, there are still clear variations in the quality of teaching in this part of the school. Teaching overall, therefore, requires improvement.
- In key stage 1, tasks do not challenge pupils well enough to ensure that they make good progress, and time in lessons is not used to good effect. For example, pupils spend too long completing tasks that they can already do before moving on to more challenging work. Sometimes, pupils complete tasks, such as cutting out pictures, which do not enable them to focus on what the teacher intends them to learn. Sometimes, pupils find their work too difficult and learning slows while they wait for the teacher to offer help.
- At times, such as when teachers give lengthy instructions or explanations at the start of lessons, or when pupils are not clear about what they are to do, some pupils start to lose interest. They become unsettled and restless and, as a result, pupils' progress is slowed.
- Teachers' questioning sometimes lacks challenge, and expectations of pupils' responses to questions are not high enough. Pupils' limited answers to questions are sometimes readily accepted. Sometimes, pupils are not expected to offer more complex answers to questions or, for example, more advanced sentences. This slows the pace of learning.
- In mathematics, teaching requires improvement. It does not provide pupils with enough opportunities to think deeply about their work, to develop their skills of reasoning or to discuss and explain their work. Pupils repeatedly practise skills that they can already do.
- Due to good teaching in phonics, pupils are developing a good knowledge of letters and sounds to help with their reading and writing. Pupils are, however, not continually encouraged to use their phonics knowledge to help them spell and write fluently. Pupils sometimes waste time trying unnecessarily to find words in their wordbooks instead of applying their phonics knowledge. This slows the pace and flow of their writing.
- Teachers consistently use and apply the school's marking policy. However, sometimes pupils do not take note of teachers' comments. As a result, pupils continue to make the same basic errors over again.
- Teachers mostly have a secure knowledge of the subjects and methods that they teach. In writing, for example, pupils were seen to apply their new knowledge about how to use an adverb or conjunction in their writing with success.
- Pupils and parents value the regular homework that teachers set. This is helping to improve pupils' understanding and skills in their work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school has a caring atmosphere and all pupils feel safe. They say that there is nowhere in the school where they feel unsafe.
- The school works hard to promote the pupils' well-being. The needs of individuals causing concern are quickly targeted, and a range of support provided. Effective work is done in partnership with local agencies when required.
- Pupils have a good understanding of keeping safe online for their age.
- The staff provide a good level of care for pupils. The pupils play safely at playtimes and move calmly around the school. As a result, pupils show a growing level of confidence and self-assurance.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- In lessons, some pupils in key stage 1 do not behave consistently well or show positive attitudes to their learning. Some have not yet fully formed the good habits of listening well and might play, for example, with their shoes or cardigans rather than think about what the teacher is explaining. As they become unsettled, they disrupt not just their own learning but that of others. Sometimes, this can happen even in small teaching groups.
- At times, a few pupils, in their enthusiasm, shout out answers in lessons, which can take away the teacher's attention and disrupt learning for themselves and others. A few need frequent and repeated reminders about how they should behave. Some teachers do not deal with such behaviour in a consistent way. For example, despite setting an expectation that pupils must put up their hands to be asked to share an answer, teachers sometimes accept answers from pupils who shout out.
- Leaders are already bringing about improvements in pupils' behaviour. Effective leadership and provision in the early years means that children quickly learn how to behave well and develop good learning habits. School records of pupils' behaviour show that leaders have successfully reduced the frequency of poor behaviour during the course of this year.
- Pupils behave well at playtimes and with one another. They say that there is little bullying and no racist behaviour. Pupils are proud of their school. However, they acknowledge that some pupils continue to behave less well than others despite the school's sanctions being applied.
- In the past, pupils' attendance has been too low and, despite improving this year, is still below average and this limits some pupils' progress. The proportion of pupils who are frequently absent has also fallen this year, but is still too high. The attendance of pupils from Pakistani and from 'White other' backgrounds remains low.
- New senior leaders quickly, and rightly, identified and acted on the long-term patterns of low attendance as a priority. They have improved the way the school encourages pupils to attend, as well as their work with parents of pupils whose attendance is a concern. An attendance officer, who is employed partly through the school's pupil premium grant, works with individual families and has helped to reduce the absences of disadvantaged pupils.

Outcomes for pupils require improvement

- Although children in the early years achieve well, progress is not consistently good in key stage 1 and, as a result, outcomes require improvement.
- In recent years, the standards reached by pupils at the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics have been low. However, as a result of effective leadership and better teaching, standards are now starting to rise. More pupils, for example, are now starting Year 1 with the level of skills needed for good learning because the early years provision is now good.
- Pupils' progress through key stage 1 varies between classes and subjects. In reading, pupils achieve well. In 2015, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level in the Year 1 phonics screening check, although still below average, rose significantly from previous levels. This reflects effective teaching in phonics. In writing, although some pupils are doing well, pupils do not use their phonics knowledge to help them spell and write fluently. In mathematics, progress requires improvement. Pupils' work in mathematics lacks the challenge needed to ensure that they achieve well.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise their basic literacy and numeracy skills when they complete work in other curriculum subjects. This continues to hamper their achievement. The standard of

pupils' writing in other subjects, for example, is not at the same standard as that seen in pupils' writing books.

- The achievement of different groups of pupils also varies. Disadvantaged children in the early years do well, but in key stage 1 their achievement requires improvement. By the end of key stage 1, disadvantaged pupils reach standards that are below those reached by other pupils in the school and are well below those of other pupils nationally. School data and inspection evidence shows that these wide gaps are now starting to close because standards are on the up. Even so, wide gaps remain and are yet to be successfully closed.
- The achievement of those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved and these pupils now do well. This is because of the well-planned support given to these pupils in lessons, which is competently managed by the head of school.
- Like many other pupils, the most able pupils do not make consistently good progress. In the early years, the most able children are provided with challenging activities that are increasingly enabling them to reach their potential. However, this is not the case in key stage 1.

Early years provision is good

- From typically very low starting points for their age, children make good progress through the Nursery and Reception classes and make a strong start to their time in school. As a result, almost two thirds of the children now reach a good level of development by the end of their Reception Year and so the majority are well prepared to start in Year 1. This figure is very close to the national average and continues a recent upward trend.
- Previous variations in how well the children achieve across the different areas of learning are being ironed out. Disadvantaged pupils, for example, now achieve particularly well. Overall, children are developing good skills in language, literacy and mathematics. Even so, some gaps remain, for example in children's understanding of the world and in expressive arts and design.
- Pupils are happy and clearly enjoy their learning. They enjoy finding and reading 'tricky words' on pirate ships and are keen to show off their talents of writing numerals in shaving foam.
- There is a strong focus on developing children's phonics skills in both the Nursery and the Reception classes. Staff check carefully in lessons that children articulate these sounds correctly and write the corresponding letters with a good pencil grip, ensuring the formation of good writing habits for the future.
- Staff provide a wide range of activities both inside and outside of the classrooms, and allow children valuable opportunities to extend their knowledge through play and talk.
- Staff work together to keep a close eye on the children's progress and have good systems in place to ensure all staff know what gaps there are in the children's learning so that they can quickly be filled. Such work is checked carefully and effectively by the early years leader.
- A good partnership has been established between home and school, and parents speak highly of the staff working in the early years team. Staff visit the homes of the children at the time when children join the Nursery and make good use of the information they gather to plan for the children's learning. These good relationships are maintained throughout children's time in the early years and play an important role in ensuring their good progress.
- There is a strong focus on developing the children's language skills in the classroom environments as well as through the way staff interact with the children. This is particularly the case in the Nursery. Bilingual staff play an important role in promoting the progress of children who are at very early stages of speaking English. This helps to ensure that these children are not left behind. Such work is partly funded by an additional grant that the school receives. However, at times, some staff do not extend children's spoken language and understanding of their learning, because of weaker questioning skills and not encouraging children to speak in full sentences.
- The early years provision is well led by the assistant headteacher, who has successfully implemented her clear view of good practice for this age group. She has the confidence and commitment of her staff team. The leader also has a clear view of the strengths and is aware of where and how she can improve the teaching and provision still further.

School details

Unique reference number	124011
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10012403

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

Type of school	Nursery and Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	167
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alison Cotton
Headteacher	Dawn Shaw (Acting executive headteacher)
Telephone number	01782 235 505
Website	www.alexinfants.co.uk
Email address	alexinf@sgfl.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	24–25 June 2014

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average infant school.
- The school has been led by an acting executive headteacher since September 2015. She is supported on a day-to-day basis by a head of school.
- A new governing body was appointed in January 2016. The school will operate under this governing body through a federated arrangement with a local junior school from September 2016.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is above the national average. This is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than average.
- A large majority of pupils are from minority ethnic groups. Just over half of the pupils are of Pakistani heritage with most other pupils from either White British or 'White other' backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is high, being three quarters of those at the school.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons, including all classes in the school. Inspectors jointly observed eight lessons with a member of the school's leadership team. Pupils were also observed playing and interacting during their break and lunchtimes.
- The inspectors looked at pupils' work from all classes covering a range of subjects. An inspector looked at the work of all the disadvantaged pupils in Years 1 and 2.
- Meetings were held with senior staff and middle leaders during the inspection and two meetings were held with members of the governing body. Inspectors also spoke to staff, pupils, two local authority advisers, a school improvement leader and an educational welfare officer concerning pupils' attendance.
- Inspectors also looked at documents supplied by the school, such as: its development plan, a range of policies, self-evaluation document, monitoring records and the school's information about its pupils' achievement and welfare, records of governing body meetings and information concerning pupils' attendance.
- Account was taken of the views of parents from discussions with small groups of parents and information from the school's own parent questionnaires. There were not enough responses from Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) to be considered.
- Consideration was made of the responses to a questionnaire completed by 20 staff holding a range of roles in the school.
- Information for parents on the school's website was scrutinised.

Inspection team

Jonathan Moore, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Joanne Evans

Ofsted Inspector

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