

River Mead School

Lowbourn, Melksham, Wiltshire SN12 7ED

Inspection dates

12–13 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	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement is not yet good. There is a legacy of low achievement over time which has not been fully overcome.
- Pupils are not achieving as well as they should in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils are not able to practise and develop their skills sufficiently, especially in writing and mathematics, in all subjects across the curriculum.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils is too variable in different year groups and subjects.
- Good teaching is not yet typical across all classes and year groups. Consequently, pupils' progress, although improving, is uneven.
- Some teachers do not plan activities that challenge pupils, especially the most able, to achieve the highest standards. Consequently, the most able pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Teaching assistants are not sufficiently well deployed to support pupils in mainstream classes and help them achieve well.

The school has the following strengths

- The head of school and executive headteacher have been unrelenting in driving forward the significant improvements since the previous inspection. Leaders aspire for every pupil to be a successful learner. Staff share this aspiration.
- There has been a culture change in pupils' attitudes to learning since the previous inspection. Pupils talk positively about school and are eager to learn.
- Children in the early years get off to a good start. They are taught well and supported effectively in their learning. They make good progress from their starting points.
- Provision in the specialist resource base is good. Pupils thrive in a nurturing environment which allows them to develop positive attitudes and make strong gains in their learning.
- Relationships between staff and pupils in the school are strong. This enables pupils to build trust and feel safe and secure.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school and is rooted in the school's core values.
- Staff are positive role models for pupils. Consequently, pupils are extremely well mannered and courteous. They show tolerance and are accepting of each other's differences.

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards of attainment by ensuring that all groups of pupils make consistently good progress as a result of teaching that:
 - enables pupils to practise and further develop their skills, especially in writing and mathematics, in all subjects across the curriculum
 - has high expectations of all and provides the highest levels of challenge to enable pupils, especially the most able, to make the best possible progress
 - deploys additional adults effectively in all lessons, so that they are able to make a positive difference to pupils' progress, especially where their work is targeted to support disadvantaged pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The head of school and executive headteacher share a strong determination to ensure that this school provides the very best education for the pupils it serves. They have been the driving force behind the significant improvements made since the previous inspection. Consequently, the school no longer has serious weaknesses and its capacity to improve further is strong.
- The head of school and executive headteacher are ably supported by staff who share their aspirations to ensure that the school continues on its journey to good and outstanding. Staff questionnaires clearly show that leaders have staff support. 'I am proud to be a part of a school that has such a strong vision for the future of our children and their progress' was a typical comment.
- Leaders have established a culture of aspiration and ambition. They are systematically tackling any underperformance to ensure that pupils receive a good quality of education. This is resulting in significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. However, these improvements are not yet consistent or reflected in pupils' achievement, which is not yet good enough, especially for disadvantaged pupils and the most able.
- Leadership in the resource base, a unit for pupils with complex learning needs, is good. Leaders ensure that pupils using this provision enjoy high levels of success given their starting points and complex learning needs. They work closely with other agencies to ensure that they provide pupils with the very best experiences.
- Subject leaders have a clear understanding of their responsibilities in leading their subjects and evaluating the impact that initiatives are having on pupils' progress. However, their work in supporting staff to improve pupils' progress in their subjects has not yet resulted in good outcomes in reading, writing or mathematics.
- The curriculum provides pupils with interesting learning experiences across a range of subjects. For example, pupils have been improving their conversational skills in French during the recent European football tournament. Leaders are committed to developing a curriculum which is 'hooking' pupils into their learning. Parents are kept well informed about what their children are learning and this allows them to support their children's learning at home. However, pupils are not practising and developing their skills sufficiently, particularly in writing and mathematics, across all subjects.
- The school provides pupils with a range of enrichment activities which are well attended. Pupils talk excitedly about the clubs they attend, which include sports, music and cooking.
- Sports funding is used for a variety of activities, including the use of specialist sports coaches and training for teachers. The school is striving to increase the range of sporting opportunities to motivate pupils to participate more regularly in competitive sport. For example, pupils recently had the opportunity to take part in a local swimming gala. However, leaders are aware that more work needs to be undertaken to inspire pupils to engage more fully in competitive sport.
- Pupil premium funding is allocated and spent appropriately. As a result, there is evidence that some disadvantaged pupils are making stronger progress. However, this is not yet consistent across all subjects and in all year groups.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school and clearly reflects the school's core values of 'friendship, respect, equality, determination, inspiration, courage and excellence'. These values underpin the school's 'golden rule' of 'treat people as you would like to be treated'. They are evident in all the school does to encourage pupils to be successful, now and as they grow into adults. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of people from different countries, cultures and beliefs. Within the school, pupils from different backgrounds show respect for each other.
- The school works effectively to develop pupils' understanding of life in modern Britain. Democracy, respect and equality of opportunity are actively promoted through the core values. Pupils can describe eloquently how everyone is different but all are equal. They understand the importance of democracy when seeking to become a school councillor. More recently, pupils describe the process undertaken to name the new playing area through a voting system. Consequently, they have a good understanding of democracy. For example, pupils spoke knowledgeably to inspectors about the recent referendum and the changes in the country's leadership.
- Many parents speak positively about the school. They are extremely pleased with the changes made since the change in leadership and the care and guidance their children receive, summed up by one parent with 'this school cares very, very much and my child is now very confident in their learning'.

■ The governance of the school

- Governors share the drive and ambition of leaders. They have a good understanding of how well the school is doing and are careful to check the information they receive from school leaders through their school visits and meetings.
 - Governors do not shy away from their responsibilities and robustly tackle the underperformance of any member of staff. They support leaders in rewarding good teaching and in challenging staff when their performance is not good enough.
 - Governors' minutes reveal how they hold leaders to account. They ask probing questions, for example on the actions leaders are taking to improve attendance. However, minutes do not record well enough how these challenges are tracked through to better outcomes; consequently, it is difficult for governors to judge impact.
 - Governors ensure the financial stability of the school through careful monitoring of expenditure. They are aware that finances are tight and take swift and effective action to make sure that the provision for pupils is not compromised.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff receive high-quality training on all aspects of safeguarding so that a clear culture of safeguarding practice is embedded across the school. Checks on staff and record-keeping are thorough to ensure that the safety of pupils is never compromised. The school works effectively with a wide range of outside agencies and is quick to take action if any concerns arise about the welfare or safety of a pupil. Staff and governors have a good understanding of the need to protect pupils from all potential risks.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Pupils are not making securely good progress because teaching is not yet consistently good.
- Since the previous inspection, the executive headteacher and head of school are taking effective action to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Increased monitoring, training and guidance are having a positive impact on raising the quality of teaching. There is evidence of some strong and effective practice, for example teachers have strong subject knowledge. They ask probing questions to challenge and deepen pupils' thinking.
- Nevertheless, there are still occasions where teachers do not sufficiently challenge pupils to ensure that they make the progress of which they are capable, especially the most able pupils. Teachers do not always use their strong knowledge of individual pupils well enough to ensure that planned activities enable pupils to make the best possible progress, lesson by lesson and day by day.
- Work in books shows not enough pupils make consistently good progress given their starting points in writing or mathematics. They do not use the skills they have learned in English and mathematics across a range of subjects. However, there are some examples of some high-quality work, such as letters written by older pupils to a Member of Parliament.
- The teaching of phonics is securing better progress for pupils and this is reflected in the improving outcomes in the Year 1 phonics check.
- The deployment of teaching assistants in the resource base is having a positive impact. They know the pupils well and deal sensitively with their significant needs. Nevertheless, leaders are fully aware that the work of additional adults could be further strengthened to aid pupils' progress across the school. Plans to develop the role of teaching assistants are already underway to bring about these improvements quickly.
- Teachers provide pupils with effective guidance and support. Consequently, pupils have a clear understanding of what they can do well and what they need to do in order to improve their work. This is helping to secure better progress. Nonetheless, because of a legacy of underperformance, this is not yet reflected in pupils' outcomes, particularly at the end of Year 6, which remain well below national averages.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' presentation and this is reflected in their books and in the work displayed in classes and in public areas. This demonstrates the pride pupils have in producing good-quality work and is an example of their improved attitudes to their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Staff have positive relationships with pupils which are built on trust and mutual respect. They are caring and remain vigilant, ensuring that the safety and well-being of pupils are not compromised.
- Pupils enjoy their learning and they attend school regularly. This is reflected in their improving attendance, which is now in line with the national average for all groups of pupils.
- The staff, especially those in the resource base, work effectively with outside agencies to support the positive development of pupils' welfare. Through these strong relationships, staff ensure that vulnerable pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive high-quality care, guidance and support.
- Pupils are taught how to keep safe through a range of experiences that are appropriate to their age and stage of development. For example, older pupils have a clear understanding of how to keep safe when using electronic equipment such as the internet or mobile phones.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils of all ages show they have a good understanding of what acceptable behaviour is. They clearly understand the consequences if their behaviour does not meet the school's high expectations. Pupils of all ages demonstrate high levels of tolerance for those pupils who find it more challenging to conform to school rules.
- Staff are positive role models for pupils. Consequently, pupils are extremely well mannered and courteous to adults and each other. They are respectful and recognise that everyone is unique.
- Since the previous inspection, there has been a significant culture shift in pupils' attitudes to learning. Pupils describe how they have a 'more focused' attitude to their learning as teachers plan more exciting and challenging activities which motivate and inspire them. As a consequence, they state that they are now 'more successful learners'.
- Playtimes and lunchtimes are happy experiences for pupils. They appreciate the opportunity to play together. Pupils describe how they appreciate the 'zoned' areas where they participate in a range of activities which include football, skipping and climbing.
- Pupils told inspectors that incidents of racism and bullying are extremely rare. They are confident that if there are any incidents, staff quickly tackle them, but they explained very clearly that 'teachers do not hold learning up'.
- On rare occasions, there are times when pupils are not sufficiently motivated or challenged with their work and some off-task behaviour occurs. This results in the pupils' rates of progress slowing and they do not achieve as well as they should, especially the most able.

Outcomes for pupils require improvement

- Historical weak teaching over several years has resulted in pupils' significant underachievement in reading, writing and mathematics. The determined action of school leaders to reverse this underachievement is having a positive effect on progress.
- As yet, the most able pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. In 2015, not enough pupils attained the highest levels in Year 2 or Year 6 in reading, writing or mathematics. This is because teaching is not sufficiently challenging and supporting these pupils to make the best possible progress.
- Children arrive in the early years with skills well below those typical for their age. As a result of the strong relationships with adults and the good teaching in both the Nursery and Reception classes, children quickly build their skills across all areas of learning. Consequently, children in the early years make good progress. Current unvalidated information shows that the proportion of children achieving a good level of development rose in 2016 and is in line with the national average. There are strong improvements in children's skills in reading, writing and number, making them well prepared for Year 1.
- Pupils eligible for pupil premium funding are making better progress than their peers in some year groups. This is as a result of the interventions they receive that meet their needs well. However, this progress is not consistent across all year groups.
- The number of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check is rising.

Unvalidated information for 2016 shows further improvement from 2015, especially for boys and disadvantaged pupils. This is a result of improvements made by leaders in the quality of phonics teaching. Consequently, pupils across the school read with greater enjoyment, demonstrating increasing confidence and fluency in their reading.

- Until recently, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities were not correctly identified. Consequently, these pupils did not receive high-quality interventions to help them make the best possible progress. This is an improving picture. School leaders review support arrangements for these pupils to ensure that additional adults target their learning needs effectively. As a result, their pace of progress further accelerates.
- Pupils who receive support in the specialist resource base are now making strong gains in their reading, writing and mathematics, given their starting points. This is as a result of the carefully targeted support they receive in the resource base and the well-planned activities they have access to in school.
- Leaders and staff demonstrate a steely determination to tackle the historic underperformance of pupils. They have made significant progress from a low base at the time of the previous inspection. Plans in place to tackle weaknesses are showing signs of a positive impact on pupils' learning. Nonetheless, pupils' final outcomes at the end of Year 6 remain low. There is more to do to ensure that pupils leave the school fully prepared for the challenges of secondary school.

Early years provision

is good

- Leadership and management of the early years provision are good. Staff carefully assess children's skills, knowledge and understanding when they join the school. They work together to carefully observe children's learning and precisely plan their next steps in order to meet their needs. As a result, children are making good progress, particularly in their writing, reading and number.
- Children join the early years with knowledge and skills well below those typical for their age. As a result of good teaching, they make good progress in both the Nursery and Reception classes. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the time they leave the Reception class is improving and is now in line with the national average.
- Teaching in the early years is good. Activities are carefully planned to excite and motivate children, increasing their knowledge and skills across all areas of learning. For example, children were enthused in their work following their visit to Bristol Aquarium, demonstrating their increasing skills in observation, communication and writing. They were able to talk knowledgeably about what they had seen and were able to write in simple sentences about their experience.
- The teaching of letters and sounds (phonics) in the Nursery and Reception classes is good. As a result, children are making good progress in their reading and writing. They can form their letters accurately using a correct pencil grip, and can apply these skills to their learning activities. Children are able to read and write simple words and increasingly use this in their independent writing.
- Disadvantaged children and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and are achieving well from their starting points. This is as a result of good teaching and an accurate understanding of their needs. Where gaps in learning are identified, swift action is taken. For example, as a result of quick and well-planned intervention, children's writing skills are improving.
- The small number of most-able children are developing into enthusiastic and curious learners. However, occasionally they are not sufficiently challenged, and this prevents them from making even stronger progress in their learning.
- Learning journals show good evidence of the progress children are making across all areas of learning. Parents have regular opportunities to view journals and contribute to them, which enables good communication between home and school.
- Children's behaviour in the Nursery and Reception classes is good. They learn to be independent, inquisitive and to ask questions. Relationships between adults and children are strong. Adults support children's social and personal development extremely well, encouraging the children to cooperate and be respectful to each other. Inspectors observed children working effectively together when working on a construction activity, sharing resources, demonstrating their good manners and celebrating when successfully completing their constructions.
- Children play happily together and learn safely. This is as a result of a nurturing environment where adults are vigilant in ensuring that children are safe and well cared for.

School details

Unique reference number	139260
Local authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	10021161

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.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	239
Appropriate authority	The trust board
Chair of the trust	Melanie Jacob
Chair of the local governing body	Helen Holland
Head of school	Nicki Henderson
Telephone number	01225 703428
Website	www.rivermead.wilts.sch.uk
Email address	office@rivermead.wilts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	29–30 January 2015

Information about this school

- River Mead School is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The school is part of The Mead Academy Trust, a multi-academy trust of three primary schools in Wiltshire. It is governed by a board of trustees which has delegated many of its functions to the local governing body for the school.
- The school has a 20-place resource base providing specialist provision for pupils with a range of complex needs. All of these pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan and are placed in the resource base from the local authority. These pupils are taught in two additional classes.
- The vast majority of pupils are White British and most pupils speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding is well above the national average. This is additional government funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above the national average.
- In the early years provision, children in Reception are taught in one class and attend full time. Children in Nursery attend part time.
- The school has a breakfast club that is managed by the governing body.
- The school met the government floor standards in 2015, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress at the end of Year 6.
- The school meets the requirements for the publication of information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons or part lessons, many of which were joint observations with leaders.
- Meetings were held with leaders, staff, governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took into consideration the responses in questionnaires completed by 29 members of staff.
- A wide range of documentation was scrutinised during the inspection, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and data relating to pupils' attainment and progress. Inspectors also checked the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements and attendance information.
- Inspectors talked with groups of pupils to seek their views about the school. The views of other pupils were gathered during lessons, playtimes and lunchtimes. Inspectors listened to pupils read.
- The 19 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, were taken into account. Inspectors also spoke to parents informally at the start and end of the day.

Inspection team

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