

# Alumwell Infant School

Primley Avenue, Walsall, West Midlands WS2 9UP

**Inspection dates**

6–7 October 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

**Good**

Early years provision

**Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- This is a happy, caring and inclusive school, where children are nurtured and thrive as a result.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have successfully improved the school since the last inspection. They have raised pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. These are both now good.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points. Those who are potentially vulnerable, disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are particularly well supported to help them make good progress.
- The teaching of phonics is a strength of the school. As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 national phonics check has improved and is broadly at the national average.
- Pupils make good progress in reading and writing. Pupils are enthusiastic readers and enjoy writing in different styles.
- Teachers generally provide interesting and motivating lessons and pupils learn well as a result.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics is not as rapid as in reading and writing. There are not enough opportunities to deepen reasoning skills or develop mathematical skills in other subjects. Teachers' expectations for the most able pupils in mathematics are not always high enough.
- The early years provision is good. Children get off to a good start in their learning. There has been a sustained improvement in children's outcomes, which are now broadly average. The range of activities offered is not as interesting and stimulating outdoors as it is indoors.
- Pupils' personal development and behaviour are good, and have improved since the last inspection. Pupils' attitudes to learning are now positive. They are friendly, kind and respectful to others.
- In 2015/16 pupils' attendance fell to below the national average. The proportion of pupils that were frequently absent rose.
- The school has a strong partnership with parents. Almost all are positive about all aspects of the school's work. The support for vulnerable pupils and their families is a strength of the school.
- Pupils feel safe in school because their welfare is given high priority. Pastoral support for pupils is at the heart of the school's work.
- Governors have improved their effectiveness in holding leaders to account for the school's performance. They provide a good level of support and challenge.

## Full report

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

- Strengthen those strategies that the school currently uses to improve the attendance of all pupils, so that attendance reaches national levels and the proportion that is regularly absent reduces.
- Accelerate progress in mathematics so that it matches the rapid progress in reading and writing by:
  - using more opportunities to deepen pupils' reasoning skills
  - consistently setting high expectations for learning in mathematics, particularly for the most able, so that all pupils are well challenged
  - ensuring that pupils have more opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in other subjects.
- Further improve the quality of provision and the learning for children in the early years by providing a wider range of creative and stimulating activities outdoors.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have determinedly, and effectively, tackled the issues identified at the last inspection. As a result, the school has made the improvements needed to become good. Senior leaders and governors have much higher expectations of staff and pupils. Teachers are now held to account for the progress of their pupils.
- Leaders have a clear vision for the school, based on an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. They have been successful in improving the school without losing sight of their core values of care, respect and inclusion for all. The result is a very harmonious community in which the school motto of 'We learn, we grow, we achieve' permeates everything the school, staff and pupils do.
- Leaders now have good systems in place to check the work of teachers. They regularly review the progress that different groups of pupils make and ensure that actions are taken to ensure that all have an equal chance to succeed. External support is used to confirm the school's own judgements. This partnership work with other schools also helps staff to check that their judgements are accurate. Leaders have eradicated weaker teaching.
- Following the last inspection, senior leaders put robust actions in place to improve reading and writing. The introduction of a new, structured phonics scheme has led to consistent teaching and improved outcomes in phonics. Initiatives, such as timetable changes to create more time for sustained writing, have helped accelerate progress in writing. Actions and training have prioritised improving the teaching of phonics, reading and writing. Plans have now been drawn up to raise the quality of mathematics teaching to match that in reading and writing.
- Staff questionnaires and discussions show that a good team spirit has been created. All agree that they enjoy working at the school, that the school is well led and managed, and that the school has improved since the last inspection. Good-quality professional development has led to a confident, well-motivated staff.
- Middle leaders, including subject leaders, are increasingly confident when making checks on pupils' learning. Good programmes of support and development are in place. These are linked both to key school priorities and to developing the individual skills of the staff.
- Staff are more quickly identifying pupils who are not doing as well as they should. Additional targeted support is given to help these pupils make better progress. The significant number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are in the early stages of acquiring English benefit greatly from this carefully targeted support. The good ratio of adults to pupils in all classes ensures that many children are able to receive individual and small-group support, which helps accelerate their progress.

- The pupil premium funding is used very effectively to support the large number of disadvantaged pupils in the school. It is used to provide additional adult support and to give pupils access to the full range of school activities. As a result of the good-quality support received, there is a greatly reduced gap between the achievement of these pupils and that of those who are not in receipt of this funding. In some instances, disadvantaged pupils perform better than other pupils. For example, in 2016, these pupils outperformed their peers in reading in Year 2.
- The primary school physical education and sport funding is used effectively to reinforce the skills of teachers and pupils, and, therefore, improve outcomes for pupils. Funding includes the provision of specialist sports coaches and the opportunity for pupils to now enter more inter-school competitions. Pupils talked excitedly about the dance festival that they recently entered against other schools and how they can attend more sports clubs. Teachers say that they have benefited from teaching alongside the coaches. It has helped improve their confidence and their specialist knowledge.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported well in all aspects of the school's work. Following an assembly about a Somalian boy travelling to the UK, pupils were heard talking about how this boy would be made welcome at Alumwell if he came there. One, echoing the views of others, said, 'At our school all the faiths play and work together.' Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of fundamental British values. They understand democracy through voting for members of the school council and that the Queen is a member of the royal family.
- The revised curriculum motivates pupils and better meets their interests. Pupils say that 'learning is much more fun'. Literacy skills are now well promoted throughout the curriculum; for example, during their Victorian history topic, Year 1 pupils are able to write a diary account of Grace Darling and recounted her rescue from the lighthouse. There are, however, not enough opportunities to similarly develop pupils' mathematical skills in a range of subjects.
- The curriculum has been designed to provide pupils with many opportunities that they may not otherwise have. The arts feature prominently. All pupils in Years 1 and 2 learn to play the keyboard. An artist recently worked with the pupils on making mosaics for the corridor; this enabled them to learn new skills, such as sculpting. To celebrate the Olympic Games, pupils learned circus skills, and made flags and their own medals. A range of visits and visitors is also used to enrich pupils' experiences. Year 2 pupils spoke animatedly about their recent trip to Tamworth Castle. They said that it had made 'the books in their class come alive' and that they enjoyed learning about 'how lords and ladies lived'.
- Parents are supportive of the school, its leadership and staff. Almost all would recommend the school to another parent. In discussion, they were keen to stress how much they think the school has improved since the last inspection. One parent summed up the views of many with the comment, 'The headteacher and teachers are always willing to listen and talk. Everyone here cares. My child enjoys her lessons and always looks forward to going to school.'
- The local authority has played an effective role in the improvement of this school through the support of advisers, the brokerage of effective training and the external validation of improvements. This has led to improvements in the quality and consistency of teaching across the school and the development of senior and middle leaders.

## **Governance of the school**

- The reconstituted governing body functions well and has improved since the last inspection. The wider range of expertise and experience within new members has helped form an effective team.
- The governing body shares the ambition and aspirations of senior leaders to ensure that the school continues to improve.
- Governors are now much more involved in the work of the school. They are much better informed about the progress of different groups of pupils from detailed reports. They visit school more regularly to see for themselves the impact of actions taken in the school improvement plan. Governors hold leaders to account much more and ask probing, challenging questions.
- The restructuring of roles has enabled governors to be better linked to key school priorities. Governors know the strengths and improvement areas of the school. They carefully oversee the school's performance management arrangements.
- Governors manage the school's finances and resources effectively. They measure the impact of spending, including the pupil premium and sport funding, on pupils' outcomes.
- The governing body meets all its statutory duties.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff and governors have been trained and are clear about protecting the welfare of all pupils. This has a high priority within school. Procedures for identifying individuals who may be at risk are clear and staff are extremely vigilant in helping pupils, and their families, overcome any barriers to their learning. Policies are up to date and procedures are robust. Effective relationships with other agencies ensure that pupils are kept safe and their welfare needs are met. As a result, the school is a safe place for pupils and staff.

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

**Good**

- Teaching is good and much improved since the last inspection when it was found to require improvement. Senior leaders have taken effective action to address any weak teaching. The work in pupils' books and the school's own information show that teaching is now good over time.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are trusting and positive, so that pupils want to do their best and are not afraid to 'have a go'. Pupils are developing good resilience through attempting to do this and are becoming more independent in their learning. Pupils are more positive about their learning due to the good 'learning climate' that teachers create. Most adults expect more of their pupils.
- Teachers generally provide lessons that capture the interest of pupils and motivate them. Adults provide pupils with lots of opportunities to share ideas and opinions together. This helps them make good progress, especially in their speaking and listening skills.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge means that in most cases they explain learning clearly and use a wide range of resources creatively. Adults question pupils well to ensure pupils' understanding strengthens.

- The school's policy for marking and giving feedback to pupils is used consistently across the school. Pupils say that teachers help them know how to improve their work.
- The teaching of literacy is much improved. Effective phonics teaching ensures that pupils are secure in the key skills they need to read confidently. Sessions move quickly from hearing and saying sounds to reading and writing. Year 1 pupils were observed carefully blending sounds together to build up words and then sentences. They showed a good understanding of 'tricky' words that could not be built up and 'alien' words that were not real. Reading is taught well so that pupils enjoy books and read confidently. The most able readers in Year 2 are able to talk about their favourite author and read accurately, with good expression.
- Pupils are encouraged to use their phonics knowledge to help them spell and write fluently. Pupils' work shows many examples of pupils exploring different texts and writing styles. Challenging tasks enable them to develop their literacy skills across different subjects. An additional focus on pupils' skills in grammar in Year 2 has led to greater accuracy in their writing. The most able are well challenged to improve their sentences and use a wide range of vocabulary and punctuation. Year 2 most-able writers were able to write a letter persuading the local council not to close the nearby public library.
- The teaching of literacy is stronger than in mathematics. This is because, until recently, much of the professional development for staff has centred on developing literacy. Teachers do not always set high enough expectations for pupils' learning in mathematics, particularly for the most able pupils. Books show that, at times, these pupils can spend time repeating something they already know instead of being moved on to a new challenge. Pupils themselves say that sometimes 'maths work is too easy'. At times, teachers miss the opportunity to deepen pupils' reasoning skills or to allow them to give explanations.
- Teachers are aware of how well each pupil is doing and what the next steps are because of the regular meetings with senior leaders to discuss the progress of individual pupils. This enables teachers to plan to help reduce any gaps in achievement. For example, teachers have ensured that they plan phonics activities which will motivate both boys and girls. This has diminished the difference between boys' and girls' achievement in phonics.
- The teaching of the significant number of pupils who speak English as an additional language is very effective. Adults model language very carefully and the use of many pictorial resources helps aid pupils' understanding. Structured speech and communication programmes delivered in small groups also help accelerate pupils' acquisition of language.

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

**Good**

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. All parents spoken to, and those who responded to the online survey, confirmed that they feel that their children are happy, well looked after and safe in school.
- Pupils thrive in a happy, very caring environment where their welfare and safety are paramount. They are friendly, well mannered and have good attitudes to learning. This improvement in learning behaviour is a marked change since the last inspection.

- Pupils who have a range of complex medical needs are very well supported. All staff know exactly what to do if problems arise.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school and know how to keep safe in a range of situations in their daily lives. They know, for example, to add something reflective to their dark coats so that they will be safer when walking home in the dark.
- Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of different types of bullying. They say that if there is ever 'a little bit of bullying' then this is quickly dealt with by the school. School logs and records confirm this. Pupils say that there is always an adult they can go and talk to if they are worried.
- Pupils enjoy their responsibilities in school and take them seriously, in roles such as council members and class helpers.
- 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.
- The school works hard to promote the pupils' well-being. The needs of any individuals causing concern are quickly targeted and a range of support provided. Effective partnership with local agencies ensures that the correct support is quickly found.

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations for behaviour and to school routines. Consequently, behaviour in lessons and around the school is good and this results in an orderly, harmonious community. Pupils cooperate and socialise well together.
- Pupils, staff and parents say that behaviour is good in school. School records confirm this and show that it has improved since the last inspection.
- Pupils show a good understanding of the school's behaviour system. They feel it is fair and enjoy the rewards, such as a playtime for retaining their 'Good to be Green' status.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. Attendance rose following the last inspection and was broadly at average levels in 2014/15, with reduced persistent absence. However, recent annual attendance has fallen to below the national average, with a rise in those pupils staying away from school frequently. The school has recently introduced new strategies to address this, but they have not yet had time to have an impact.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

### **Good**

- Outcomes for pupils have improved since the last inspection. All groups of pupils are now making good progress from their starting points. More current pupils are on track to achieve and exceed the expectations for their age. This is because of changes made to the curriculum and the improving quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Current progress is good. Work in pupils' books and school information show that pupils are much better prepared for the next stage of their education. Progress in mathematics, however, is not accelerating as rapidly as that in reading and writing.
- There has been an improved trend over time in national assessments since 2013. In Year 2, in 2015, standards rose in reading, writing and mathematics, to be broadly in line with national averages. This reflects at least good progress from pupils' previous low starting points. Nonetheless, fewer pupils attained expected or more than expected levels in mathematics than in reading or writing.

- Standards in the national assessments in 2016 are below the provisional national averages. However, over one third of this cohort were pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, with some who have very complex needs. There was also a significant number of pupils in the early stages of acquiring English as an additional language. All pupils in the cohort made good progress from their starting points.
- The proportion of pupils who achieved the expected level in the Year 1 phonics screening check has risen since 2013. It has risen from only half the pupils attaining the expected level in 2013 to over three quarters attaining it in 2016. This is now broadly at the national average. In 2015, there was a gap between the attainment of girls and boys; in 2016 this has now almost closed. Almost every pupil achieved the required level by the end of Year 2. This is as a result of the consistent and accurate teaching of phonics and additional interventions for any pupil at risk of falling behind.
- The most able pupils generally make similar progress to that of other pupils in the school. Occasionally, work given in mathematics does not always challenge them or help deepen their understanding. This means that they do not always make the rapid progress of which they are capable.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive close support from adults to ensure that all are secure in their learning. Consequently, they make good progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress due to the carefully targeted support that they receive. In the 2015 Year 1 phonics check, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils attaining the expected standard continued to rise, with the gap between their performance and that of others in the class diminishing. There was a similar picture in the Year 2 national assessments, where disadvantaged pupils performed better than similar pupils nationally. Provisional 2016 results show that the gap has almost diminished, with a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils making more than expected progress than the others in the class.

## Early years provision

**Good**

- Children start in the Reception class with skills and knowledge that are generally well below those typical for their ages, particularly in their communication and language skills. They make at least good progress from their starting points. The proportion attaining a good level of development at the end of Reception has increased every year since 2013. In 2015 and 2016, a broadly average number of children attained the expected level. Children are well prepared to start Year 1.
- Leaders know the strengths of the provision and what needs to be done to further improve children's learning experiences. This has enabled the school to maintain its good early years provision seen at the last inspection.
- Classrooms are lively and stimulating places. Activities stimulate children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning. Children worked enthusiastically on a range of activities centred on the story 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'. A group of children was observed designing and making beds for the bears using cardboard boxes, and another group was developing their early writing skills by making marks and patterns in porridge oats.
- Currently, the outdoor provision is not as stimulating as that indoors. It does not offer as many opportunities for children to be creative, or to explore a wide range of activities.



- There is a strong focus on developing children's language and communication skills. Staff model speech well when interacting with the children. New vocabulary is introduced and carefully reinforced. Staff take every opportunity to develop children's confidence in speaking. Staff who are bilingual play an important role in promoting the progress of children who are at very early stages of speaking English as an additional language. This helps to ensure that these children are not left behind.
- Children are engaged well in their learning. Well-prepared, structured tasks and activities children can choose for themselves enable them to practise already developed skills and try out new experiences. Opportunities to develop early reading, writing and mathematical skills are well threaded through the provision.
- Phonics is well taught and a love of reading is encouraged. A group of children was observed using masks with an adult to retell a story. The children were well motivated and continued developing the activity themselves later without adult help.
- Staff build quickly on children's previous knowledge and learning, and this enables children to learn quickly. Children's interests are included when activities are planned. Staff use the good knowledge they have about individual children's skills to plan effectively for the needs and abilities of all children, including the most able.
- Children are well settled into the daily routines despite only having been in school for a few weeks. They have positive attitudes to learning and behave well. Children are learning to share resources and cooperate with others.
- There are good procedures to get to know the children and their families before they start at school. Good relationships with parents and the regular sharing of information ensure that parents are kept well informed about their child's progress.
- Staff know the children well and create a warm, welcoming and safe environment. Relationships are strong. Children are confident in approaching any adult if they are upset or worried. Children's welfare is given the highest priority. As a result, children are happy, confident and enjoy school.

## School details

Unique reference number	1104143
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10020014

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	268
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Barbara Langley
Headteacher	Donna Harper
Telephone number	01922 720886
Website	<a href="http://www.alumwell-i.walsall.sch.uk">www.alumwell-i.walsall.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office@alumwell-i.walsall.sch.uk">office@alumwell-i.walsall.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	8–9 October 2014

## Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is larger than the average-sized infant school.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above the national average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average and has increased since the last inspection.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has increased since the last inspection and is above average.
- Early years provision in the three Reception classes is full time.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 18 lessons across all year groups. Four of these were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of pupils' work, whether in lessons or as a separate activity.
- Meetings took place with staff, pupils, governors and two representatives of the local authority.
- The inspectors took account of the views of 11 parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and three written comments. Parents were also spoken to at the start of the school day. The school's own parent questionnaire from July 2016 was also scrutinised.
- Inspectors considered the views of 12 staff who completed the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors attended an assembly, heard pupils read and observed break- and lunchtime behaviour. A learning walk was carried out with the headteacher. Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documents, including: the school's own information on pupils' learning and progress; the school's own check on its performance; planning and monitoring documents; and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding of pupils.

## Inspection team

Mary Hughes, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Deborah Campbell	Ofsted Inspector
Jeanette MacKinney	Ofsted Inspector

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