

Rowans Primary School

Rowans, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire AL7 1NZ

Inspection dates

15–16 November 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

- The systems for checking pupil progress are not yet rigorous enough to establish an accurate picture of how well pupils are doing.
- Gaps in pupils' basic knowledge, particularly in reading and mathematics, are slowing down the speed of progress that many pupils need to make to catch up.
- The role of middle leaders is not yet developed well enough, especially linked to using monitoring, to inform their actions to rapidly improve standards.
- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Although pupils are polite and well-mannered around the school, during lessons they are not independently resilient and this stops them applying their learning effectively.
- Although improving, the quality of teaching is too variable across a range of subjects. Consequently, achievement for pupils in all areas across the curriculum is not consistently good.
- The newly implemented curriculum is not yet fully developed across all subjects. As a result, pupils are not receiving a broad and balanced curriculum.
- Over time, while getting better, in key stage 2, too few pupils make enough rapid progress to ensure they attain the nationally expected standards. This results in Year 6 pupils not being sufficiently ready for the next stage of their education.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have high expectations and are ambitious for the school. They demonstrate capacity to secure further improvement.
- Early years is a strength of the school. It is well led and managed, with children making good progress from their typically low starting points.
- Attendance is rapidly improving. This is particularly so for those pupils who previously were persistently absent. This is as a result of close scrutiny of attendance information and leaders swiftly acting upon what it tells them.
- Pupils are well cared for in a nurturing environment. This is most notable in the nurture provision that the school provides to support more-vulnerable pupils.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - further developing phase leaders and curriculum subject leaders so they have a greater influence on improving teaching, learning and assessment, and consequently, pupil outcomes
 - continuing to increase the effectiveness of the governing body's ability to rigorously challenge the school's performance so that leaders are held appropriately to account for the work of the school
 - evaluating the assessment systems in place to make sure that there is thorough, accurate evidence that informs leaders about the progress and attainment of all pupils
 - reviewing curriculum provision to ensure that pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum and leaders know how well pupils are achieving in other subject areas apart from reading, writing and mathematics.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - making sure that consistently good teaching is sustained across the whole school to secure better achievement for all pupils
 - ensuring that pupils in key stage 2, particularly in Years 5 and 6, make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics in order to catch up so that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Improve pupils' learning attitudes and behaviour by:
 - developing pupils' resilience and ambition to do the best that they can, particularly in key stage 2.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- When joining the school, the headteacher and deputy headteacher faced the significant challenge of a legacy of inaccurate assessment information, weaker teaching and resulting pupil underachievement. They, along with governors, are determined that standards will improve. However, since the previous inspection, pupil progress has not been rapid enough to ensure pupils, particularly in key stage 2, catch up quickly.
- The headteacher has taken rigorous action to eradicate weaker teaching. Teachers are now being held more to account for the progress that pupils make and there is regular monitoring in place to review teachers' performance. Teachers who are new to the profession are well supported and an effective training programme is in place for all staff. This is contributing towards the quality of teaching consistently improving. However, there are many aspects that require attention and they are still in their infancy. There has not been enough time for these to make enough of a difference to pupil achievement.
- Staff believe the school has improved since the previous inspection. They rightly feel that the school is now well led and that pupils are cared for. Staff say they are proud to be working at the school.
- Leaders keep a close eye on the quality of teaching, and are making sure that teaching is improving. They check teaching by observing in lessons, looking at pupils' work and monitoring teachers' planning. However, the assessment system is not yet rigorous enough to effectively inform teaching. Consequently, the gaps in older pupils' knowledge and understanding are not closing quickly enough.
- Leaders have recently introduced a new topic-based curriculum; however, too much focus has been given to reading, writing and mathematics at the expense of delivering a more broadly balanced curriculum. As a result, the development of other subjects is not yet good enough to ensure that pupils receive appropriate opportunities to achieve well across the curriculum. Additionally, inspection evidence shows that pupils do not regularly apply their writing skills in subjects such as science, history, religious education, and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to support pupils academically and socially. The number of disadvantaged pupils in the school is increasing. The pupil premium champion is effective in coordinating and providing appropriate individualised support for disadvantaged pupils. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are making better progress, particularly in writing, where they achieve better than other pupils nationally.
- Leaders use the primary sports funding to provide a good range of sporting activities. This is securing improving pupil participation in extra-curricular clubs. The funding is also helping to improve physical education provision, for example by providing coaching opportunities for teachers so that they are feeling more confident in their delivery of physical education.
- Some aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are promoted well. Pupils are also given the opportunity to discuss British values, for example older pupils are aware of what democracy means and recognise that tolerance is a good

quality to have. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility, and enjoy helping out around the school, particularly at lunchtime when they help set up and put away for the younger children. Pupils can also choose to apply to be a house captain and members of the school council. One pupil said that he wanted to be a school councillor so that he could 'make some decisions about the school'.

- Leaders have worked hard to establish a positive working partnership with parents. The school provides empathetic pastoral support to pupils and families. One parent said: 'Rowans is a very nurturing school. The leadership team and all the staff really care about the pupils and all have time for them.' This view is supported in the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, where the majority of parents say they would recommend the school to other parents.
- The local authority provides appropriate support. Regular visits from the improvement partner and other consultants support the school to develop the areas to further move the school forward. For example, all staff have been trained in the new assessment system adopted from the local authority.

Governance of the school

- Following the previous inspection, governors undertook an external review of governance. They used the recommendations to make changes in the way that they carry out their roles. For example, governors feel more confident and are beginning to work more strategically. Additionally, the recruitment of new governors is adding strength to their capacity.
- Although governors know the school well and ask some challenging questions, evidence from records of meetings show that the headteacher provides a lot of guidance. As a result, the challenge is sometimes not rigorous enough and the governing body is not able to hold leaders to account to the extent that it should.
- The governing body oversees performance management. It makes scrupulous decisions, following the headteacher's recommendations, about increasing teachers' pay linked to their performance.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that staff and governors are up to date about keeping children safe. They are fully trained in child protection, including the risks of extremism and radicalisation. Staff know the school's agreed procedures and appropriately follow them when they have a concern about a pupil's safety and well-being. Inspection evidence demonstrates that records are detailed and followed up rigorously.
- The school has successfully reduced the number of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent. Great care is taken to work positively with families so they are supported to make sure their children attend school more regularly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is variable over time and is not yet consistently good throughout the school. In reading and mathematics, in particular, not all teachers use what they know about pupils' starting points to plan effective lessons to fill gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Consequently pupils make slower progress than they should. This is particularly so in key stage 2, where they need to catch up quickly so they are ready for their secondary education.
- Improving the teaching of reading is a whole-school focus. Pupils receive regular opportunities to practise their understanding of what they read. Inspectors listening to pupils read found that younger pupils are able to use their phonics knowledge to try unfamiliar words. However, older pupils struggle to use this strategy successfully because their phonics skills are not good enough. This is due to historically weaker teaching. Leaders are aware of the discrepancy between the phonics skills that the younger and older pupils have and there is now intervention in place. Not enough progress has yet been made to ensure that the oldest pupils in the school acquire the skills to be good readers.
- The teaching of mathematics is improving as a result of focused staff training and guidance in teaching pupils to apply their basic skills. Work in books shows that pupils are given the chance to learn all the appropriate national curriculum objectives. However, older pupils do not make rapid enough progress because they have significant gaps in their basic knowledge. For example, in a Year 5 class, some pupils working on equivalent fractions understood the concept but did not have the competency in their multiplication skills to successfully complete the task.
- Writing is improving over time. Evidence in pupils' books shows that the teaching of writing effectively incorporates spelling, grammar and punctuation skills. However, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to produce extended pieces of writing across the curriculum to better their writing skills. Although pupils' writing achievement is currently greater than in reading and mathematics, inspection evidence shows that pupils are capable of more. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils.
- Teachers communicate effectively with teaching assistants, helping them to provide appropriately individualised support to meet pupils varying needs well.
- The system to strengthen feedback given to pupils to help them improve their work is effective. Pupils make good use of dedicated time to reflect upon their previous learning and consider how they might improve it. Inspection evidence shows that pupils understand the purpose of the 'gap tasks' they are given and this is beginning to improve pupils' ambition to want to be successful.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school provides a good level of care for its pupils. All staff know pupils well, and positive relationships help pupils to feel safe and secure. Pupils say that they can talk to any adult in the school about any of their worries and are reassured that they will receive advice and support.
- Nurture provision for pupils who need support to work successfully in the classroom is provided effectively in 'the den'. In addition to planning bespoke academic activities that fully meet the varying needs of pupils from their starting points, adults also ensure pupils' emotional well-being is carefully considered. As a result, pupils not only make good progress but also have a more positive integrated classroom experience.
- Pupils are safe in school and say they feel safe. They are able to explain why they should not share personal information when online, and also are aware of scenarios that will present a risk to their safety. The school's focused week on anti-bullying and e-safety further raised pupils' awareness and heightened the profile of pupils knowing how to keep themselves safe. For example, the assembly taught pupils about the dangers of playing computer games online with people they didn't know.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- The behaviour of older pupils, in particular, is sometimes inappropriate. They are not as resilient as younger pupils. While there are many older pupils who behave appropriately, there are some that push the behaviour boundaries more frequently.
- During inspection, observations showed that generally well-behaved older pupils can be easily distracted by more challenging behaviour going on around them and sometimes choose to follow bad examples. Their learning attitudes are not yet good enough to ensure they apply themselves fully to their work. They tend to exhibit immature attitudes, leading to slower progress. Consequently, they do not achieve as well as they could, and many are not sufficiently ready for the next stage in their learning.
- Analysis of school information shows that, otherwise, pupils' behaviour is improving, and there are generally fewer incidents of inappropriate behaviour. The school is working hard to encourage pupils to reflect upon and improve their work. There is evidence that younger pupils have positive attitudes to learning, for example when they get stuck they do not give up, but persevere.
- Children and younger pupils are developing positive behaviour habits well. At lunchtime they eat their lunch sensibly and move around the school in a calm, orderly way.
- Pupils enjoy school and now attend well. Leaders' sustained focus on ensuring pupils attend school regularly is paying off. Pupils say that they like coming to school because 'it is fun' and they like being with their friends.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Children enter the early years with skills and knowledge below those typical for their age. During their Nursery Year and Reception Year, children make good progress from their starting points and the number achieving a good level of development is increasing.
- In 2016 the number of Year 1 pupils who achieved the expected score in the phonics screening check was below the national average. Results have improved over time however, and both observation of phonics lessons and hearing pupils read show that pupils' achievement in phonics is rapidly improving.
- Historically, pupils in Year 2 have not achieved well enough. However, this picture is improving, and results in 2016 show that pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics is closer to the national average, and that it is better than the national average in writing.
- Unvalidated information shows that in 2016 the proportion of Year 6 pupils who reached both the expected and the high standard in reading and mathematics was below the national average. As a result, pupils have not been fully ready for the next stage of their education. However, pupil progress is improving and pupils' books show that more pupils are currently making better progress in order to catch up by the time they leave Year 6.
- In the 2016 national tests the proportion of all pupils who attained the expected level in writing was above the national average; however, those who attained the higher standard in writing was below.
- Most-able pupils do not achieve as well as they could. In the 2016 unvalidated results for reading, writing and mathematics, the proportion of pupils who reached the higher standard was below national average. This is still evident in pupils' current work whereby, for example, pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply their writing skills across the curriculum.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. This is particularly the case in writing. Inspection evidence shows that appropriate support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities helps them to catch up in reading and mathematics. For example, the support the pupils receive in 'the den', as part of additional provision, is successful in ensuring these pupils achieve better than they have in the past.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well from their starting points in reading and writing. Their attainment in mathematics was not shown to be as strong in the 2016 tests. However, the support that is being put in place is helping to improve pupils' progress over time, and there have been improvements in disadvantaged pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. The achievement of the most able disadvantaged pupils in reading, writing and mathematics shows that they are attaining as well as other pupils nationally.

Early years provision

Good

- Since the previous inspection, early years has undergone significant improvement. Leadership and management of early years are good.
- Inspection evidence shows that children, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged children and the most able make good progress in their learning from their generally low starting points. This is particularly the case in communication, literacy and language.
- The deputy headteacher has an insightful overview of early years. Both the Nursery Year and Reception Year work effectively together to ensure that transition for the youngest children in the school between early years and Year 1 gives them a good start to their education.
- Positive relationships between children and adults enable the children to settle into the provision quickly. The activities adults plan are creative and respond to individual children's interests and personal experiences. Consequently, children enjoy their work and pursue the tasks enthusiastically.
- In the previous inspection, there was a recommendation for early years to improve its use of the outdoor environment. The school has worked successfully to achieve this. Children are now spending as much focused time in the fully resourced, well-planned outside environment as they do in their classroom. This is ensuring that children are being given many opportunities to develop their early basic skills in a purposeful way. As a result, children are making good progress and are well prepared for Year 1.
- Parents are encouraged to take an active part in their children's learning, for example by contributing to children's learning journals with 'wow moments sheets' to share their learning from home.

School details

Unique reference number	117257
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10022969

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	188
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Monika Szita-Rimann
Headteacher	Mrs Joanne Reed
Telephone number	01707 321203
Website	www.rowans.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@rowans.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–12 February 2015

Information about this school

- Rowans Primary is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Children attending the early years provision are taught part time in the Nursery and full time in the Reception Year.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups, and those whose first language is believed not to be English, are the same as the national average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and receive support is above the national average.
- An on-site pre-school uses the school's Nursery accommodation in the afternoon. This is inspected separately.

- The school provides a breakfast club which is managed by the governing body.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes, some of which were visited jointly with the headteacher. Inspectors also made short visits to all classrooms to look at pupils' books and assess the learning environment.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, the early years leader and representatives of the governing body, including the chair.
- The inspection team met informally with pupils at lunchtime and during their lessons. Groups of pupils met with the inspectors to talk about their views of the school, and both inspectors heard pupils read.
- A scrutiny of pupils' books from the 2015/16 academic year, and current pupils' work, including mathematics, English and topic-folders, was undertaken by the inspection team.
- The school's own assessment information, and a wide range of paperwork, was examined. This included governing body minutes, records relating to the monitoring of the school's work, pupil attainment and progress, behaviour, exclusion, attendance and safeguarding, and also monitoring and evaluation documents. The lead inspector evaluated a wide range of information available on the school's website.
- Inspectors considered the 19 parent texts, and 62 responses made by parents to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View). Additionally, inspectors looked at the 20 pupil views submitted on the online pupil survey, and the 17 views expressed by members of staff in response to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Fiona Webb, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Tracy Fielding

Her Majesty's Inspector

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