

Woodlands Primary School

Eddisbury Road, Whitby, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire CH66 2JT

Inspection dates

13–14 December 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	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The school's overall effectiveness has declined since the previous inspection. Until very recently, leaders' and governors' efforts to tackle a drop in standards have been unsuccessful.
- Leaders have not systematically measured the impact on pupils' learning of different initiatives that they have introduced. As a result, the school's work to improve standards has lacked clarity and has not had the required results.
- Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning have not identified and remedied inconsistencies in the effectiveness of teaching across key stages 1 and 2.
- Teachers are not consistent in their expectations of what pupils should achieve in mathematics and English. As a result, pupils make uneven progress in different classes and year groups.
- Teachers do not consistently use information about pupils' learning well enough when planning activities. As a result, they too often ask pupils to do work that is either too easy or too hard for them. This slows their progress.
- Middle leaders are still developing the skills and knowledge that they need to be fully effective in raising standards in their subjects.
- Teachers do not give pupils sufficient opportunities to develop their writing skills in different areas of the curriculum.
- In mathematics, pupils' recording of their work is sometimes unclear, and this causes confusion when they are learning key mathematical strategies.
- Governors have not had the skills and knowledge required to hold school leaders consistently and robustly to account over time.

The school has the following strengths

- Outstanding provision in the early years means that children get off to the best possible start to their time in school.
- The executive headteacher and other leaders have an accurate view of the school's position. Their actions are beginning to bring about necessary improvements.
- The school provides effective support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Pupils' behaviour is good, and they say that they are happy and feel safe in school. Attendance rates are consistently good.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels by:
 - improving governors' skills and their understanding of information about the school's performance, so that they more rigorously hold school leaders to account
 - ensuring that leaders make better use of the checks they make on the quality of teaching and learning across key stages 1 and 2 to identify and eliminate current inconsistencies
 - developing the skills and knowledge of middle leaders, particularly in English and mathematics, so that their work to secure improvement in their subjects has the maximum impact on raising pupils' achievement
 - ensuring that leaders more accurately measure the impact that initiatives have on pupils' learning to focus the school's work more clearly on those activities that make a positive difference.
- Improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning, to raise standards throughout key stages 1 and 2, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use information about pupils' attainment more consistently to plan lessons that meet pupils' different learning needs, so that work is pitched at the right level
 - have consistently high expectations across the different classes in each year group of what pupils should be achieving, particularly in mathematics and English
 - give pupils sufficient opportunities to practise and develop their writing skills in different subjects
 - consistently help pupils to become more secure in their mathematical understanding by insisting that pupils' recording of their work in mathematics is clear.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and governors have been unable to ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and pupils' outcomes in key stages 1 and 2, have remained at the good level seen in the previous inspection. While the quality of provision in early years has remained at its previous high level, the drop in the effectiveness of the school's provision in key stages 1 and 2 has led to a decline in its overall effectiveness.
- Actions taken since the previous inspection have not had the impact on standards that leaders had hoped. When mathematics was identified as the area most in need of improvement, leaders took decisive action to introduce a new mathematics programme. This strengthened some aspects of pupils' mathematical learning, such as their ability to talk about their work and solve problems. It did not, however, ensure that their basic mathematical skills were secure. Consequently, pupils' progress was hindered by errors in arithmetic and calculation.
- In a similar way, attempts to improve standards in writing in key stage 2 led to the English curriculum becoming unbalanced. Consequently, standards in writing rose to be above the national average, but the school's standards in reading, that were previously typically average, dropped to well below that level.
- The recently appointed executive headteacher and other senior leaders have identified the issues that had a negative impact on pupils' performance in 2016, as well as more longstanding concerns about pupils' rates of progress. They have put together a simple and sharply focused plan to tackle these issues so that gaps in mathematical knowledge are filled and the imbalance of the curriculum in English is eradicated. Work in pupils' books and assessments of the progress pupils have made this term indicate that these actions are having a positive impact on pupils' learning.
- These changes have been embraced by staff and parents alike. The overwhelming majority of staff and parents are highly supportive of the executive headteacher and share his ambition to make the school as good as it can be.
- Middle leaders responsible for particular subjects, including English and mathematics, are developing their knowledge and skills in checking and improving the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. They are also supporting teachers to ensure that expectations are consistent from class to class. Their actions are beginning to have a positive impact on the effectiveness of teaching.
- The school provides pupils with an interesting curriculum that is enhanced by trips to local places of interest, such as Ness Gardens and Chester Cathedral. The curriculum now ensures good coverage of a broad and balanced range of subjects, although teachers do not consistently make the most of the opportunities for writing that the curriculum provides.
- The school makes effective provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Its particularly strong work on moral and social issues is evident in pupils' clear sense of right and wrong and their ability to discuss the relevance of events such as Remembrance Sunday. Pupils also develop an appreciation of fundamental British values, and talk confidently about the democratic process used to

elect their head boy and girl.

- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to enhance disadvantaged pupils' learning experiences and to ensure that support is put in place to overcome specific barriers to these pupils' learning, such as social and emotional needs. School records show that this work is helping disadvantaged pupils to gain access to the full curriculum. However, the school has been less successful in measuring the impact of its work on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, with consequent inconsistencies between year groups and across different subjects. The leader responsible for pupil premium funding is aware of this and is now ensuring that staff and governors are more sharply focused on the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils when considering information about the school's performance.
- The primary physical education and sport funding is effectively used to ensure that pupils have access to a wide range of sporting activities, both in school and through extra-curricular clubs. Pupils say that they enjoy attending the different clubs, and a number have also had the chance to represent the school in sporting events such as cross-country races.
- The local authority has provided effective support for the school. Its staff have helped the school to secure leadership capacity through an executive headship arrangement with another local school, and have ensured that the school also has the resources required to target improvements in the key areas of teaching and learning.

Governance of the school

- The governing body has been slow to recognise the implication of a yearly decline in progress in key stage 2, and governors have been lulled into a false sense of security by attainment that has been typically in line with national averages. Consequently, they have failed to hold leaders to account for the school's performance and have not been able to halt a deterioration in the school's overall effectiveness.
- There is no doubting governors' commitment to the school, as can be seen by high rates of attendance at meetings of the governing body and its committees. The results of assessments in 2016 have been a wake-up call, and governors now have a clearer understanding of the school's position. The chair of the governing body recognises that governors' skills and knowledge are not sufficiently strong for them to provide effective support and challenge to school leaders.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Thorough checks are made on staff, including visiting coaches and supply staff, governors and volunteers, to ensure that they are suitable people to work with children. An electronic system is used to keep a clear record of people entering and leaving the school, and pupils are aware that all visitors to the school wear a badge to show that they are allowed in the building.

- School leaders have ensured that safeguarding is given a high priority. Staff and governors all receive regular training to ensure that their knowledge is up to date, and this training is regularly repeated so that any new staff are able to participate. As a result, staff have a clear understanding of what to do if they have a concern about a pupil. Records show that any concerns raised are carefully recorded and followed up, and that effective partnerships exist with other agencies.
- The school occupies a large site, with infant and junior departments split by a road running between them. Governors have ensured that security fencing and access gates are well maintained, and staff follow clear procedures to make sure that pupils are safe coming into and leaving the school at the start and end of the day.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- There are inconsistencies in the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment throughout key stages 1 and 2. Teachers do not have consistent expectations of what pupils should achieve in English and mathematics in each year group. This leads to variability in the level of challenge given to the most able pupils in some classes and in the amount of support that pupils receive in other classes when they find the work harder.
- These differences are magnified by variations between classes and year groups in the way teachers use assessment information to plan activities pitched at the right level for different groups of pupils. These inconsistencies lead to work that is too easy for some pupils but too challenging for others.
- Changes to the school's approach to teaching mathematics are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' learning. Teachers' efforts to develop pupils' reasoning skills and their ability to talk about their mathematical thinking have been successful. Pupils are articulate and use mathematical vocabulary well. Until recently, however, pupils' calculation skills have lagged behind, and so their work in mathematics has typically been hindered by needless errors with basic arithmetic. This has led to pupils making slower progress in mathematics, particularly in key stage 2. Teachers are now tackling this problem and pupils' confidence with number and calculation is growing. Even so, inconsistencies in the accuracy of pupils' mathematical recording are still causing some confusion when pupils are learning formal calculation methods.
- There is now a logical and structured approach to teaching writing across key stages 1 and 2. Teachers are ensuring that pupils cover a range of different genres so that they know how to write in a range of styles. Teachers are also focusing clearly on pupils' skills and knowledge in using grammar and punctuation accurately, so that their written work is more accurate. This approach is beginning to have a positive impact on the writing seen in pupils' books, although teachers are not providing pupils with enough opportunities to develop their writing in different subjects.
- Well-chosen and suitably challenging texts underpin the school's work in teaching reading, backed up by a strong and effective focus on the teaching of phonics in the early years and key stage 1. Younger pupils become increasingly proficient in using their phonic knowledge to help them tackle tricky words, although the less confident readers sometimes need reminding to use their phonic skills. The older, most-able

readers show a real enthusiasm for reading and have wide-ranging tastes in books, from simplified versions of Shakespeare to modern authors such as Jacqueline Wilson.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in different situations. They explained that the fencing around school made sure that 'nobody naughty can come in', and could describe sensible rules to follow when using the internet, such as telling a teacher if somebody they didn't know tried to contact them.
- Pupils are aware that there are different types of bullying, including cyber bullying and bullying related to racism and homophobia. They know that any kind of bullying is unacceptable, and say that bullying in their school is rare. Pupils are confident that staff would deal quickly with any bullying that did happen so that the people involved could 'fix their mistakes'.
- Pupils' experiences at Woodlands are enhanced by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, such as football and gymnastics, and by a variety of school trips and visits. Pupils speak enthusiastically about trips they have made linked to their topic work, such as to Conwy Castle and Ness Gardens, and also about the opportunity that they have had to take place in exciting events such as the 'Young Voices' concert.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are polite, friendly and welcoming to visitors. Around the school they behave sensibly and show care and consideration for others. In class, pupils encourage each other well and are happy to help if they see one of their classmates struggling with their work. The very small number of pupils who need additional support to help them to manage their own behaviour are well provided for.
- The overwhelming majority of the parents who spoke to inspectors, or who completed the Parent View survey, said that their children were happy and felt safe at the school. This view was supported by the pupils themselves and is reflected by the happy and orderly atmosphere around the school.
- Attendance rates are typically above the national average and no group's learning is adversely affected by regular absences from school. Pupils enjoy coming to school.
- Pupils display positive attitudes to learning. They listen well and settle quickly to the work that teachers set them, and are keen to answer questions and offer ideas in class. Occasionally, when not reminded by the teachers, pupils present their work in mathematics carelessly and this makes it harder for them to apply strategies accurately, such as when working with numbers in columns.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- School leaders, including governors, have not recognised a decline in outcomes because attainment at the end of key stage 2 has, over time, been typically in line with the national average. This has deflected their attention away from the typically less positive information about the progress that pupils have been making.
- Results in 2016, particularly at the end of key stage 2, have acted as something of a wake-up call. The proportions of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading and mathematics were both significantly below the national average, as were progress scores in the same subjects. In key stage 1, a below-average proportion of pupils achieved the expected standard in both writing and mathematics.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check also dropped to below the national average in 2016, having been well above that figure in previous years. However, the proportion reaching the expected standard by the end of Year 2 remained strong, and pupils currently in key stage 1 showed that they are able to use their phonics skills confidently in their reading.
- Pupils' achievement in 2016 was stronger in writing in key stage 2 and in reading in key stage 1, which illustrates some of the inconsistencies in achievement in the school. There are similar inconsistencies in the performance of the school's most-able pupils. In writing, the proportion of most-able pupils achieving the highest standard is above average in both key stages 1 and 2, as it is in reading in key stage 1. This is in contrast to mathematics, where fewer pupils reached the higher standard than expected.
- Leaders realised that pupils' learning in mathematics was unbalanced, with significant gaps in their core number skills even though their skills in problem solving and reasoning were developing well. Work in pupils' books, supported by recently completed assessments, shows that some of these issues are beginning to be ironed out. Pupils are now more effectively developing the key calculation skills that they need. There are still occasions, however, when their presentation causes uncertainty when they are using formal calculation methods.
- The number of disadvantaged pupils in each year group varies considerably, and this makes it difficult to judge their achievement in some year groups throughout the school. At the end of key stage 2 in 2016, disadvantaged pupils' attainment and progress followed a similar pattern to those other pupils in the school – being much stronger in writing than reading and mathematics. In the previous year, their performance was stronger in reading but weaker in writing. The school identifies disadvantaged pupils well, and makes additional support available for these pupils. Systems for checking on the effectiveness of this support are still being developed, however, so it is not yet clear how effective the school is in accelerating the progress made by disadvantaged pupils.
- The school provides effective support for the small numbers of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They have detailed, individualised learning plans that identify clear steps of progress from their different starting points, and good

support from teaching assistants and teachers ensures that they make good progress.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Outstanding provision in early years ensures that children get off to the best possible start to their school careers at Woodlands. Children come into the Nursery with knowledge and skills that are typical for their age in most areas of learning, but with less confidence and experience in reading, writing and mathematics. Children make excellent progress from their different starting points, so that by the time they leave the Reception class, the proportion of children achieving the good level of development, and the proportion exceeding that level, are both above the national average.
- The early years leader is the driving force behind the high quality of provision across the Nursery and Reception classes, and has ensured that the outstanding standards seen in the last inspection have been maintained. She makes regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning across the early years, and on the records of children's progress that staff maintain. Staff across the early years share her vision of what excellence in early years provision looks like, and the early years staff are intent on maintaining that standard.
- Central to the progress that children make is teachers' careful planning, which is based on accurate and detailed ongoing assessments of children's learning. This ensures that teachers plan activities that are consistently well matched to children's learning needs and so move children's learning on at a rapid pace. This is in sharp contrast to practice in key stages 1 and 2, where strategies for assessment and planning are less well developed and thus less effective.
- Children are very well challenged through an exciting range of activities that capture their interest and encourage them to become resourceful, independent learners. High-quality interactions between staff and children help to move learning on at a good pace and encourage children to talk about what they are doing and what they have learned.
- The school provides very well for the two-year-old children in funded places. It makes effective use of the extra funding for the small proportion of disadvantaged children in the early years. For these children, progress from their starting points is as strong as that of other children in the early years.
- Behaviour in early years is extremely good. Children get on well with each other. Staff ensure that children's safety and well-being are given a high priority and all statutory welfare requirements are met.
- The staff in early years have been very successful in working with parents to further support children's learning. Parents speak very highly of the early years provision and the progress that their children are making in both Nursery and Reception classes. They appreciate the strong links between home and school and say that they feel fully involved in their children's education.
- The school works well with other early years settings through local groupings of schools, taking opportunities to share strategies for assessment and planning. Staff have worked effectively with staff from other settings that take two-year-olds to increase their knowledge and understanding of the specific needs of younger children.

School details

Unique reference number	135136
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10026366

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	Community
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	654
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janice Wainwright
Headteacher	Craig Richardson
Telephone number	0151 338 2260
Website	www.woodlands.cheshire.sch.uk/
Email address	admin@woodlands.cheshire.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	19 March 2015

Information about this school

- This school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from different minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Children in the early years provision attend the Nursery part-time and Reception class on a full-time basis.
- In 2015, the school met the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information on its website about the most recent key stage 2 results, links to the website showing school performance tables or its charging and remissions policy.

- The executive headteacher joined the school mid-way through the autumn term 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a range of lessons, year groups and subjects.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and held discussions with two groups of pupils. Inspectors also talked informally with pupils around the school and on the playground.
- Pupils' work in books, records of children's learning in the early years and other information about pupils' attainment and progress were scrutinised with senior leaders.
- Inspectors considered the 79 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also talked briefly with some parents before the start of the school day, and took into account two emails received from parents during the inspection.
- Meetings were held with two governors, including the chair of the governing body. Meetings were also held with leaders responsible for mathematics and English, disadvantaged pupils, provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and for children in the early years.
- Meetings took place with two representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors examined a range of documents. These included information about pupils' attainment and progress, the school's reviews of its own performance, checks on the quality of teaching and development plans and various records of pupils' attendance and behaviour. Inspectors also examined in detail the school's arrangements for safeguarding, including a wide range of relevant records and documentation.
- The inspection was initially instigated following a complaint to Ofsted. The inspection did not investigate the complaint itself, but the broader issues raised by the complaint were considered as part of the inspection process.

Inspection team

Neil Dixon, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mavis Smith	Ofsted Inspector
Jane Austin	Ofsted Inspector
Tina Cleugh	Ofsted Inspector
Ann Dimeck	Ofsted Inspector
John Shutt	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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