

Houghton Regis Primary School

St Michael's Avenue, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 5DH

Inspection dates

25–26 January 2017

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	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Teachers have not ensured that pupils make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 2. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply their numeracy and literacy skills across subjects.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are not consistently good. Teachers' expectations are not high enough across all classes and subjects of the curriculum. The most able pupils underachieve.
- Teachers do not use assessment information well to guide the work of teaching assistants and plan learning for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils who are disadvantaged.
- Systems to check pupils' progress and manage the performance of staff are new. They have not made enough difference to the achievement of pupils.
- Some senior and curriculum leaders do not have the skills required to evaluate and improve their areas of responsibility.
- Early years provision is not led well enough. In the Reception class, teaching and assessment are not planned effectively. Too many children are not well prepared for Year 1.
- Attendance is below average. The attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils who are disadvantaged is particularly low.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher has made a good start. She knows exactly what needs to be done to improve the school. Governors use their high level of expertise to support and challenge leaders.
- Teaching at key stage 1 is effective. There is some good practice for staff to share and learn from.
- Pupils, including children in the early years, are well cared for. Staff meet the behavioural and emotional needs of pupils very well.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They care about and respect others. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
- The large majority of parents support the school and would recommend it to others.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that senior and curriculum leaders, including in the early years, have the necessary skills to contribute to improving the school
 - implementing a rigorous plan to train staff and develop their knowledge of the national curriculum at key stage 2
 - consolidating the systems for tracking pupils' progress to inform the management of staff performance
 - checking that additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged is making a real difference to pupils' achievement and their attendance.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - raising the expectation of what pupils can do, especially in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 2
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to practise their problem-solving and writing skills across the curriculum
 - checking that activities are matched to pupils' learning needs and abilities, including for children in the early years
 - improving the way in which teachers guide the work of other adults in the class
 - ensuring that the school's assessment policy is applied consistently well so that pupils receive precise guidance on how to improve their work.
- Work more closely with families to improve attendance.

An external review of the use of the pupil premium funding 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

- The way in which staff are adapting to the new style of leadership and governance is mixed. Some are very positive and a few are not. Some senior leaders are not contributing enough to the strategic leadership of the school. Teachers have had insufficient training to understand the demands of the national curriculum, especially in mathematics. Leaders have been given more time this year to monitor their areas of responsibility, but this is too recent to have accelerated pupils' progress.
- At the beginning of this academic year, the new headteacher, and the new chair and vice-chair of the governing body quickly evaluated the school's strengths and weaknesses. In the light of the low results in July 2016, the headteacher accurately identified areas where significant improvements were required, but her new strategies are not yet having the intended impact.
- The curriculum at key stage 2 does not provide pupils with enough opportunities to practise and develop essential literacy and numeracy skills. Consequently, pupils' outcomes by the end of that key stage are not as high as they should be. At key stage 1, pupils' topic books show a more positive picture, with good attention paid to improving handwriting, spelling and punctuation.
- The effectiveness of the leadership of early years is inconsistent. The Nursery provision is well managed and the youngest children in the school do well. This positive start is not sustained in the Reception class because children's starting points are not used well to move their learning on.
- The leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils who are disadvantaged is not effective. The assessment systems are too new for performance information to be sufficiently reliable. The most able who are also disadvantaged are only just now being identified.
- The headteacher is providing the school with the coherent and ambitious leadership it needs. With the support of governors, she is demonstrating that the school has the capacity to improve. Successes include a more effective system to track pupils' progress, frequent meetings to review pupils' achievement, robust procedures to manage the performance of staff and a determined effort to eradicate ineffective teaching.
- The large majority of parents support the new leadership. Several parents said that staff were highly committed and that the new headteacher wanted to act on parents' views whenever possible, for example through the 'you said—we did' approach. A few parents, however, feel that communication is not good enough and they would like to know more about the progress their children are making. Inspectors found that leaders and governors are listening to and acting on parents' suggestions. The headteacher is starting to gather better information on pupils' progress. She has clear plans on how to involve parents more in the life of the school.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted effectively. Opportunities to promote fundamental British values and prepare pupils for life in modern Britain are highlighted throughout the curriculum. The teaching of British values, such as tolerance and respect, is reinforced through the school's own set of values, which pupils understand. Pupils are taught about right and wrong, listening to different viewpoints and about the value of caring for others, such as through their support for charities and 'Grandparents' Day', where they learn about the local community.
- The school provides a good range of sporting activities and clubs beyond the school day. The physical education and sport premium for primary schools is used effectively. Pupils' participation in sporting activities and competitive sports is increasing. The clubs on offer cater for different interests and parents report that staff willingly give their time to running these initiatives. Links with other schools and providers, such as Milton Keynes Sports College and Dunstable Rugby Club, further enhance opportunities for pupils.
- The local authority did not check well enough that high standards and effective teaching were being maintained at key stage 2 over the time it took for the school to grow into a full primary school. The November 2016 external audit judged it to be a good school. This evaluation does not match some aspects of the school's recent self-evaluation or the findings from this inspection. The headteacher is developing a good working relationship with the school improvement partner. Local authority briefings, for example about safeguarding, are very informative and ensure that the school meets its statutory obligations.

Governance of the school

- Governors ensure that resources are used wisely, but until the recent past, they have not monitored well enough the impact of the pupil premium and special educational needs funding on the progress of eligible pupils.
- Governors have increased their involvement in the strategic development of the school and raised their expectations and accountability of senior leaders. They are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have a clear vision for its development.
- The new chair and vice-chair of the governing body are reviewing the current committees to provide an effective structure to hold leaders closely to account.
- Governors are beginning to have more precise information about pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching. Governors are clear that teachers' pay progression depends on how effective they are in helping pupils make good progress.
- Governors bring a high level of expertise and commitment to the school. They ensure that arrangements for safeguarding are effective, including their own training, completing all pre-employment checks and liaising with the local authority as required.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The headteacher has tightened up procedures. Safeguarding is secure and meets all requirements. Policies have been updated. Expectations of staff and pupils are high. All staff have had relevant training.
- Concerns for pupils known to social care services are recorded in sufficient detail. Chronologies of significant events in pupils' lives are kept up to date. The headteacher and the designated safeguarding lead are rightly improving the filing system so that records are more easily accessible and kept in good order.
- The designated safeguarding lead knows how and when to access early help services. Contact with the local authority's early help team is prompt and the thresholds to access social care services are understood. The school works effectively with external agencies to provide timely support for pupils. The parent support worker knows the families very well. She ensures that those in need of intensive support are helped at times of crisis.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching is good at key stage 1 but less effective at key stage 2. Pupils therefore have an inconsistent experience. Over time, senior leaders have not coordinated training well enough to support staff who need it most. The lack of understanding of the national curriculum and an underdeveloped assessment system affected the progress of pupils at key stage 2 and led to low results for Year 6 in 2016.
- Significant variation in the quality of planning and assessment of work for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged means that they are not doing as well as they could. Insufficient information is shared between the coordinator for special educational needs, the class teachers and other adults who support pupils' learning. Where teaching is less effective, teaching assistants are not always deployed effectively. The work of the newly established pupil premium team is well conceived and is starting to make a positive difference to pupils' progress.
- In most classes at key stage 2, the most able pupils, including those eligible for pupil premium funding, are capable of achieving far more than they currently do. Limited formal assessment exists to measure pupils' progress in subjects other than English and mathematics. Opportunities to explore complex language or solve problems are not offered often enough across the key stage 2 curriculum. Insufficient challenge for the most able pupils means that these pupils conscientiously complete their work but not at the level or speed of which they are capable. There are some examples of high-level work, such as in Year 1 science where the topic links well to healthy eating, and in physical education when exercise is used to explain the functions of the heart. Some homework projects enable most-able pupils to be creative and apply their skills at a higher level.

- The quality of teaching and assessment in the Reception class is not precise enough to help children make rapid progress. Staff work hard but the planning and management of learning activities, including the use of the outdoor area, are not effective enough. Teaching is good in Nursery.
- Teaching is good overall at key stage 1. The teaching of phonics enables pupils to recognise letters and the sounds they represent. A high proportion of children enter Year 1 with gaps in their knowledge and current teaching is helping pupils to catch up. Pupils have regular opportunities to read by themselves. Those who read to the inspectors did so with confidence and fluency. Across all years, the quality of teacher-led group reading varies. Some of it helps pupils to read fluently and with confidence, but some of it does not do this well enough. Improving writing is a key priority for the school and teachers check carefully the quality of pupils' writing in English.
- The teaching of mathematics is generally effective at key stage 1. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and carefully consolidate pupils' numeracy skills through topic work. For example, in science, pupils have carefully investigated what happens to wildlife during the autumn. In 2016, pupils did well in the Year 2 national tests. At key stage 2, the leader for mathematics has not developed staff's knowledge and understanding enough. Teachers' expectations are too low and the work seen in the books of older pupils is far too easy for pupils of this age.
- There are some aspects of effective teaching in all classes. Teachers use a range of methods and approaches to sustain pupils' interest. They develop pupils' knowledge of technical and subject-specific vocabulary. Some staff use probing questions to encourage pupils to explain their thinking and ideas. Teachers often pick up on misconceptions, such as when pupils struggled with reading measurements in millilitres in a Year 4 mathematics lesson.
- Practical resources and artefacts support pupils' learning well. For example, in art and design, pupils could explain why they were using Chinese letters while making their Chinese lanterns. This developed their curiosity about another culture and supported the work done in literacy about describing a Chinese dragon. In the topic on 'digging up the past', pupils used historical artefacts, explored local history and wrote very well about how to make oatcakes.
- Staff are reflecting on their practice following the headteacher's frequent monitoring and feedback. The quality of teaching is strong at key stage 1 and outcomes are good considering the above-average number of pupils who have low starting points at the beginning of Year 1. Most teachers are applying the school's marking and assessment policy and responding well to the headteacher's guidance.
- The large majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire, Parent View, are positive about the quality of teaching. They said that teachers work hard and are approachable. A few parents were concerned about staff changes and about the large Year 6 class. Inspectors found that staffing is managed well and pupils in Year 6 are supported by several adults. There is insufficient evidence to link the size of the Year 6 class to the slow progress of some pupils.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils' personal development is not outstanding because, although pupils listen well in class, they are not often curious about their learning and rarely ask questions to further their understanding. In addition, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged rely heavily on the support of additional adults. These pupils are not self-assured learners.
- Pupils enjoy working hard and trying their best. They are well behaved, even when they complete their work quickly if teaching is less demanding than it should be.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and well cared for. Pupils were observed behaving very safely. They understand how to stay safe, including when using social media.
- Pupils respect the views of others. They have a good understanding of the school's values and pupils of all backgrounds get on well together. The oldest pupils like to volunteer for jobs. Members of the school parliament, in particular, enjoy the responsibilities that they are given. Children in the early years who speak little English make friends very quickly. The new house system is encouraging all pupils to embrace new challenges.
- Pupils are very active. They play well together on the playground and in their physical education lessons. Older pupils are good role models for younger children in the school. Pupils spontaneously go to the 'friendship stop' if they feel sad or lonely.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- In lessons, pupils are well behaved, and they listen attentively to adults and to each other. The new 'good to be green' policy is applied well and pupils learn a lot from it. The school is a calm and orderly environment.
- In the early years, behaviour is good. Children are well versed in all the school's routines. They share toys, respond well to instructions and spontaneously line up when it is time to go outdoors.
- Pupils are aware of different types of bullying and incidents are rare and 'nipped in the bud' before issues escalate. Bullying and other forms of discriminatory behaviour are rare. Pupils say that they have no hesitation in telling an adult if they need help.
- A very small number of parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire are concerned about a few cases of bullying. Inspectors found that any incidents are thoroughly investigated. Bullying is not tolerated.
- Most pupils want to attend school but attendance is below average. Several initiatives to promote good attendance and punctuality are beginning to have a positive effect. The attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged is well below that of all pupils in the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Progress at key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics is too slow. Too few older pupils make better than expected progress. In 2016, results for Year 6 pupils were well below the national average.
- The wide variation in outcomes between boys and girls and between different ability groups is due to the lack of consistently good teaching over time and lack of robust leadership of some subjects. Scrutiny of pupils' work in key stage 2 shows that current pupils are not yet on track to achieve the challenging targets set by leaders and governors.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those supported through the pupil premium grant do not achieve well enough because support is not targeted well. Low attendance is also affecting continuity in their learning. In the past, the school did not identify most-able pupils who were also disadvantaged. This is being remedied and the pupil premium team is actively identifying pupils who have the potential to achieve highly.
- Over the past two years, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the national phonics check has been below average, in part due to the insufficiently precise teaching in the Reception class.
- From their low starting point on entry to Year 1, pupils make good progress at key stage 1. The Year 2 results in 2016 were at least in line with the national expectation, with a good number of pupils achieving the higher levels. At key stage 1, the systematic teaching of phonics is improving the skills of current pupils. Pupils who read with inspectors could break words down and decode unfamiliar words to make sense of them. Current pupils are doing well in writing and mathematics.
- Senior leaders acknowledge that, based on their starting points, many more pupils should be making better progress at key stage 2. This is partly due to the impact of recent staffing changes and the limited achievement of some pupils who joined the school at times other than the start of each year. In addition, teachers do not place enough emphasis on teaching and applying literacy and numeracy skills across subjects.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- In 2016, less than half of all children achieved a good level of development by the end of Reception Year. Staff changes impeded developments and too many children were not prepared well for work in Year 1. Outcomes for current children are showing some improvement.
- The good progress made in Nursery is not used well enough to move children's learning on. Children's starting points are not checked carefully enough and, in Reception, some activities do not meet children's needs. Challenge for the most able children is lacking.

- Staff often plan too many activities. This makes the management and assessment of learning far too complicated. The balance between children choosing their own work and being directed by adults is not quite right. For example, in some sessions, none of the children chose the writing activities and they were not guided towards them. Opportunities were missed to develop this important skill.
- The teaching of phonics is systematic but confused, at times, when adults do not help children identify letters and repeat sounds carefully enough. The teaching of numbers is given emphasis and adults expertly rehearse counting practice in routine activities such as, in the Nursery, when children change activities and are brought back together by clapping and counting to 10.
- Children in Nursery and Reception have a happy and positive experience. Children's personal, social and emotional development is improving quickly because staff provide a high level of care to each child.
- Children quickly learn how to work alongside each other. They know the school's routines and spontaneously line up before play or sit at a table to eat their snacks safely. Staff help children to learn how to share resources and toys.
- Children learn in a safe environment. Children's statutory welfare, safeguarding and safety needs are met fully. Staff are trained to the correct level for first aid.
- The local authority adviser is providing helpful training and support to develop staff's professional skills and this is improving current provision. There are clear plans to develop the outdoor areas.
- The parents who spoke to the inspectors appreciate the opportunity to talk to staff at the beginning and end of the day. Parents and childminders say that they can express their views and value the information they receive about their children's learning. One parent wrote that her child loves going to school and that the extra-curricular activities benefited children greatly.

School details

Unique reference number	109459
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10023381

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	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	326
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jackie Mew
Headteacher	Bernice Waite
Telephone number	01582 867487
Website	www.houghtonregisprimary.co.uk
Email address	houghtonregis@cbc.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 February 2012

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information on its website. Information is insufficient about the key stage 2 curriculum, the barriers faced by pupils eligible for pupil premium funding and the date of the next review of the pupil premium strategy. The report for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities lacks detail.
- From September 2013, Houghton Regis School expanded into a full primary school for pupils aged three to 11 and, for the first time in 2015, a class of Year 6 pupils took the key stage 2 national tests. The size of the school is above average.
- The predecessor school, Houghton Regis Lower School, was inspected in 2012 and judged good.
- The number of pupils who are supported through the pupil premium funding is below average.

- Most pupils are White British. About 13% of pupils come from a range of different ethnic backgrounds. The vast majority of pupils speak English as their first language. Few are at the early stages of learning English.
- The proportion of pupils who have support for special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- In the early years, children have part-time education in Nursery and full-time education in Reception.
- In 2015, the school met the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6. In 2016 floor standards were not met.
- There have been significant changes in staffing and leadership since the previous inspection. The long-serving headteacher retired in July 2016 and a new headteacher took up post in September 2016. The deputy headteacher relinquished her responsibilities in December 2016 and the Year 6 class teacher is currently acting as deputy headteacher. Leadership roles and responsibilities have been reallocated and some leaders are new to their role. A new chair and vice-chair of the governing body took up post in September 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes and several sessions were jointly observed with the headteacher.
- Throughout the two days of the inspection, inspectors spoke with pupils, individually and in groups, about their learning and safety.
- Inspectors listened to pupils reading. They reviewed pupils' work in lessons and analysed samples of work in books, on display in classrooms and around the school.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with the chair of the governing body and several other governors.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior and curriculum leaders and other staff, including members of the newly established pupil premium team, the coordinator for special educational needs and the parent support worker.
- Inspectors looked at the school's review of its own performance, its development plan, a number of key school policies and the minutes of governing body meetings. They considered a range of documentation in relation to child protection, safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors analysed 52 responses to the online questionnaire for parents (Parent View). An additional 17 comments were sent to the lead inspector. The school's own annual survey completed by parents was analysed.
- There were 27 staff who completed the Ofsted staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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Diane Hawkes	Ofsted Inspector
Parv Qureshi	Ofsted Inspector
Kevin Sadler	Ofsted Inspector

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