

Bleakhouse Junior School

Bleakhouse Road, Oldbury, West Midlands B68 9DS

Inspection dates

2–3 February 2017

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide strong, principled leadership. They are determined that every pupil should get the best possible education.
- The school's staff form a united team who share the headteacher's vision of high-quality education for all. Morale is very high.
- Teachers' checks on pupils' progress are regular and accurate. Leaders use this assessment information very well to identify pupils who need extra help.
- Subject leaders are developing their expertise, but currently rely heavily on the headteacher and his deputy. Consequently, their checks do not always have a sufficiently speedy impact on improving some aspects of teaching.
- Governors know the school well, including its many strengths and few weaknesses. They support and challenge leaders very effectively.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points across all subjects. However, progress is a little weaker in mathematics than in English.
- Pupils who need extra help make very good progress. This is because leaders carefully plan additional support and they check that it is having the desired impact.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils. Classrooms are vibrant and well organised, with clear routines that all understand and follow.
- Relationships are excellent across the school. Teachers know their pupils well and pupils like and trust their teachers.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge which they use well when they ask questions. Pupils have to think hard before answering and teachers do not accept superficial answers.
- The teaching of phonics is particularly effective. Consequently, many pupils with low starting points are making rapid progress in reading.
- The teaching of reasoning is weaker than the teaching of other areas of mathematics. Although pupils have strong basic skills and knowledge, some do not apply these well when solving problems. Teachers do not always spot when this is the case.
- Pupils behave very well in lessons, and at breaktime and lunchtime. The school is calm and orderly throughout the day.
- Pupils are confident and articulate. They are unfailingly polite, courteous and well mannered. They work particularly well together, listening carefully and helping each other.
- Attendance is consistently higher than the national average for primary schools. Pupils enjoy school.
- Pupils feel safe, and are safe, in school. They trust the school's adults to deal with any problems that might arise.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the teaching of mathematics so that pupils make consistently strong progress by ensuring that:
 - pupils are taught to think more deeply and reason when solving problems
 - teachers regularly and consistently identify and tackle pupils' mathematical misconceptions.
- Sharpen leadership by:
 - ensuring that issues identified by subject leaders' checks on teaching quickly result in those issues being tackled
 - developing subject leaders' confidence and expertise so they are less reliant on senior leaders.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher make a formidable team. They are passionate about providing the best possible education for each pupil. They lead with honesty and integrity and they command the respect of pupils, parents, staff and governors. One parent who responded to Parent View said: 'Bleakhouse is a very well-managed school which encourages parental involvement. There is very good school/parent communication and a nurturing staff who are always available. The school has excellent leadership.'
- Senior leaders and governors know the school very well. They carry out detailed and regular checks on teaching and pupils' progress. Their self-evaluation is honest and accurate. They identify and tackle weaknesses quickly and effectively.
- Senior leaders target training well to individuals and issues where it is most needed. They then carefully check that it has had the desired impact. Consequently, teachers and other members of staff feel well supported and teaching is consistently good across all year groups. High-quality support for newly qualified teachers means that they quickly establish routines and expectations in their classrooms. They are fulsome in their praise for the school and the support that leaders and other colleagues have given them.
- Subject leaders form a hard-working team. They are relatively new to their roles and are growing in confidence. They are now fully involved in checking on teaching in their areas. However, they currently rely heavily on senior leaders for guidance and direction. It also falls to the senior leaders to pass on to other staff the learning points from these checks. Consequently, subject leaders' checks on teaching do not always result in speedy action to address issues they have spotted.
- Leaders' and teachers' checks on pupils' progress are regular and accurate. These begin with establishing accurate baseline starting points when pupils join the school. Leaders use ongoing assessment information well to identify any pupil who needs extra help with their work. Leaders have designed a large number of 'interventions', short programmes of additional support given to pupils who need extra help, delivered by teachers and teaching assistants. These range from help with spelling, reading or mathematics to help in developing social skills. Leaders carefully check that each intervention is having the desired effect. If not, it is discarded and another one is used. Because of this meticulous and systematic approach, pupils who need extra help make strong progress and catch up with their classmates.
- Leaders use pupil premium funding well and disadvantaged pupils are making increasingly good progress as a result. Class teachers make sure that disadvantaged pupils are a top priority when they plan lessons and give feedback. Regular progress checks trigger effective extra help when any disadvantaged pupil begins to fall behind. Pupil premium funding is also used to provide additional opportunities, such as music lessons, which contribute to pupils' personal development.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities shares the strengths of that for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders accurately identify pupils' additional needs and then teachers and teaching assistants provide high-quality support, both in

lessons and at other times. Consequently, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points.

- Leaders use the sport premium well. External coaches provide high-quality physical education lessons and extra-curricular activities. Teachers observe and help with these lessons and activities and are therefore able to deliver them in the future.
- The curriculum is carefully planned and regularly evaluated by leaders, taking into account pupils' views. It has an appropriate focus on developing pupils' basic skills, especially those who join the school with low starting points. This focus is supplemented by an imaginative 'big book' thematic curriculum that includes most other subjects, while maintaining an effective cross-curricular emphasis on reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils enjoy their learning and are enthusiastic about the topics they are studying. During the inspection, inspectors observed highly effective teaching of science, geography, art and physical education.
- The formal, taught curriculum is supplemented by a variety of extra-curricular activities and visits, including football, dance, gymnastics, art and reading. The school's promotion of British values is a particular strength, especially of respect and equality. For example, pupils named the school's houses after famous Olympians and Paralympians. Similarly, pupils recite the school prayer each day, a non-religious prayer, written by the headteacher and based around a combination of the Olympic and Paralympic principles.
- The school's clear ethos, high expectations, well-designed curriculum and range of additional opportunities contribute extremely well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In their time at the school, pupils develop into confident, mature young people well prepared for their next steps in life.
- The local authority provides effective support to leaders and governors. Most recently, this has focused on validating leaders' assessments of pupils' starting points and pupils' progress through all year groups. For example, the local authority has carried out a phonics screening check of all pupils in Year 3 in order to confirm the school's assessments and also to help them to plan remedial phonics teaching in Years 3 and 4.

Governance of the school

- Governors know the school very well. Although leaders provide regular and accurate information about all aspects of school life, governors carefully check what they are told with other sources of information. They have a good understanding of externally published data, including its limitations in the school's context. They visit the school regularly to talk to leaders and visit classrooms with them. They make good use of the local authority's 'school improvement partner' to validate leaders' views.
- Governors hold the headteacher in high regard and provide strong support for his vision for the school. However, they also provide rigorous challenge to the headteacher and other leaders. For example, governors questioned the rate of improvement in mathematics outcomes, and this led leaders to sharpen their mathematics action plan this year.
- Governors carry out all statutory duties diligently. They check that all safeguarding requirements are met. They ensure that additional funding, including the pupil premium, the sport premium and funding for pupils who have special educational

needs and/or disabilities, is providing value for money. They ensure that leaders and teachers are set challenging targets that are well focused on improving teaching and raising standards.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The leadership of this area is meticulous. Policies and procedures are clear and well understood by staff. Leaders understand procedures to recruit staff safely and they use these well. All staff are trained and updated regularly. Consequently, they are confident to pass on any concerns they have. School leaders are equally confident in knowing when to pass on concerns to the local authority and they are happy to challenge when they feel the response has not been satisfactory. Records are very well organised and stored securely.
- Staff understand that pupils' safety and well-being is their top priority. A culture of care pervades the whole school. Almost all parents who responded to Parent View agreed that their children feel safe and well cared for in school, as did all parents and members of staff who spoke with inspectors during the inspection.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers expect all pupils to behave well and work hard. Lessons are well planned, using high-quality resources. Teachers establish clear routines which are consistently applied by experienced and newly qualified teachers alike. Consequently, classrooms provide excellent learning environments in which pupils thrive and make good progress.
- Relationships are excellent. Because pupils like and trust their teachers, they are not afraid to answer questions or tackle demanding activities. Relationships between pupils are equally strong. They are not afraid to 'have a go' even when they find tasks difficult, secure in the knowledge of their classmates' support.
- Teachers use questions skilfully to deepen pupils' understanding of their work. Pupils usually think hard and provide detailed and considered answers. When their answers are brief or superficial, teachers probe more deeply and insist that pupils refine their responses.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge that they use well to explain concepts, plan lessons, select resources and give pupils feedback. This is especially evident in the highly effective teaching of phonics in Years 3 and 4. Pupils who join the school with weak basic reading skills make rapid progress as a result.
- Teachers successfully ensure that pupils develop excellent study skills. Pupils collaborate very effectively in groups. They listen respectfully to each other, and they share ideas and support each other. For example, inspectors observed groups of pupils sensibly collecting ideas for a poem they were to write, and others working together to build three-dimensional structures from spaghetti and marshmallows. Pupils are equally able to work alone, thinking and concentrating hard. Inspectors observed pupils working independently as they completed extended pieces of writing.

- Teaching is particularly effective for pupils who need some extra help because they are falling behind with their work. Teachers' assessments of pupils' progress are regular and accurate and used well to identify pupils who need extra help. For example, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are given well targeted and appropriate support depending on their particular needs. Other pupils who are falling behind are also given equally high-quality extra help to catch up with their peers.
- The teaching of mathematics is more variable in quality than other subjects in the school. The teaching of basic skills, such as times-tables, is effective and pupils become fluent in the use of arithmetic as they progress through the school. However, the teaching of reasoning to solve mathematical problems is less strong and some pupils find this more difficult as a result. For example, inspectors observed pupils calculating the areas of compound shapes. Some pupils were able to think their way to finding the area of the more complicated shapes. However, other pupils resorted, incorrectly, to a formula or rule because they were unable to use reasoning effectively.
- Teachers usually check carefully and regularly that pupils understand what they are doing in lessons. If pupils are struggling, they give extra help or change their plans if necessary. Occasionally, teachers' checks are less effective and they do not spot when pupils have failed to understand an idea. Inspectors observed this to be the case occasionally in mathematics lessons.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are confident and articulate. They are fiercely proud of their school. Many pupils enthusiastically told inspectors about the different activities and leadership opportunities provided by the school. Members of the school council told inspectors about how pupils had raised money for a pupil at a different school. Pupils in the 'Learning League' told inspectors about how they observe lessons and give teachers feedback. Prefects explained their duties and pupils explained how they had voted for their head girl and head boy.
- Pupils are caring, considerate and respectful of others who are different from them. The school's house system, with each house named after a famous Olympian or Paralympian, actively and explicitly promotes pupils' understanding of different ethnicities and people who have disabilities. Pupils are unfailingly well mannered.
- Pupils feel safe in school. All pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they feel safe in school. They said that bullying is very rare and they trust the school's adults to deal with any bullying, or other problems which might arise.
- Pupils understand how to stay safe and live a healthy lifestyle. Recent work on e-safety means that pupils know about the potential hazards of using the internet. They also understand how to keep themselves safe from such hazards.
- Inspectors spoke with several pupils who had joined the school comparatively recently. All were fulsome in their praise for their new school and especially of how friendly and welcoming their classmates had been.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well throughout the school day. In lessons, they are attentive, hard-working and keen to do their best. Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent and they take pride in the work they do in class.
- At breaktime and lunchtime, pupils are equally well behaved. They play together sensibly and show consideration to each other. The school is calm and orderly at all times.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance is consistently higher than the national average for primary schools. Although not low, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has historically been lower than other pupils. However, thoughtful work with parents is seeing the attendance of this group improve and the difference between their attendance and that of other pupils is diminishing.
- Fixed-term exclusions are very rare because pupils behave well and, when they do not, other sanctions are used well so that poor behaviour tends not to be repeated.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The school, supported by the local authority, conducts extensive and rigorously moderated assessments of pupils' attainment in all years. For example, the local authority carries out a phonics screening check on all pupils in the autumn of Year 3. Similarly, writing and mathematics assessments are moderated by a local primary school. The school's assessment information shows that pupils make good progress and detailed inspection evidence confirms this to be the case. This is at odds with published information on pupils' progress because of inaccuracies in the identification of pupils' starting points in that data.
- In recent years, pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2 has been broadly in line with national figures. Attainment in mathematics has been a little weaker than in reading and writing. The school's baseline assessment of pupils' starting points on entry to the school indicates that this represents good progress, especially in English. Inspectors' examination of the school's assessment information alongside extensive scrutiny of pupils' work confirms that current pupils continue to make good progress.
- Pupils who join the school with weak basic reading skills make rapid progress in Years 3 and 4 because of high-quality phonics teaching that helps them to catch up. Leaders' strong focus on reading in all years ensures that this progress is maintained in Years 5 and 6. Pupils enjoy reading. They read widely and often and with enthusiasm.
- Pupils make similar good progress in writing in all year groups. Progress is especially rapid for pupils who join the school with weak writing skills. Inspectors saw several examples of pupils' writing that was illegible at the start of Year 3, but that quickly improved. Inspectors also observed pupils writing at length and in depth in several subjects, including English, science and geography.
- Current pupils make good progress in developing mathematical knowledge and fluency in basic skills, such as calculations. However, their overall progress in mathematics is slowed because their ability to apply skills and knowledge to problem solving is not as

strong. This is particularly, but not exclusively, the case for middle-ability girls.

- The most able pupils make consistently strong progress in all subjects. Expectations are high, teaching is good, and these pupils rise to the challenges that teachers provide.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making increasingly good progress because their teachers make them a priority when planning lessons and giving feedback. Leaders use the pupil premium very well to target extra help to any disadvantaged pupil who is beginning to fall behind with their work. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils are catching up with their peers in English and have caught up in mathematics.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because leaders, teachers and teaching assistants give them high-quality support. Leaders accurately identify these pupils' individual needs and teachers and teaching assistants provide extra help in lessons and at other times.
- By the end of Year 6, pupils are very well prepared for secondary school. They have strong basic skills, excellent attitudes to learning and are able to work well in groups or alone, as appropriate.

School details

Unique reference number	103934
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	10025294

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	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	244
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sarah Wilton
Headteacher	John Bates
Telephone number	01214 222841
Website	www.schools.sandwell.net/bleakhousejnr/
Email address	headteacher@bleakhouse.sandwell.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	17–18 January 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- This is an average-sized junior school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. A below-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- The school exceeds the current floor standards, which set out the government's minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons, and some of these were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their learning and their attitudes to, and opinions about, school. They observed pupils at breaktime and lunchtime and as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors heard pupils read and talked to them about their reading.
- Inspectors observed an assembly.
- Inspectors scrutinised the work in many pupils' books in order to make judgements about the progress they were making.
- A wide range of documents was scrutinised, including information relating to attendance, behaviour, safeguarding, pupils' progress and the checks made on the quality of teaching.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and other leaders, and three governors, including the chair of the governing body. The lead inspector spoke over the telephone with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke with parents at the beginning and the end of the school day and considered 23 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 16 free-text comments.
- Inspectors took account of three responses received to a staff inspection questionnaire.

Inspection team

Alun Williams, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Justine Lomas

Ofsted Inspector

Jeremy Bird

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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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