

Swallow Dell Primary and Nursery School

Blackthorn Road, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire AL7 3JP

Inspection dates

23–24 May 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
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and governors share a strong ambition for all pupils to receive a good education. They aspire to make Swallow Dell the school of choice for the local community.
- Senior leaders form an effective team. They know the school's strengths and areas for improvement well. Their strong leadership is evident in the improving progress current pupils are making.
- Leaders use assessment particularly effectively to identify any barriers to pupils' learning, so that the right help can be provided.
- Pupils' progress is good and standards are rising across the school. However, some tasks for the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, do not challenge them enough.
- Children get a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes. As a result, they are well prepared for Year 1.
- Teaching is good overall, but some teachers do not routinely promote pupils' writing skills, such as the use of grammar and punctuation. Also, feedback to pupils about their writing does not give pupils a clear understanding of how to improve.
- Swallow Dell is very inclusive. Everyone is treated fairly and equally.
- Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils enjoy working together and helping one another. The school promotes their happiness, self-esteem and mental health effectively.
- Staff give pupils outstanding opportunities to play meaningful roles and help shape the direction of their school. Pupils respond positively to these opportunities.
- Pupils and their parents say they feel happy and safe at school. However, some pupils are regularly absent from school and this can affect their learning. A relatively high proportion of pupils are also late at the start of the day.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure teachers' planning for the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, provides the stretch and challenge these pupils need.
- Further improve pupils' writing skills by ensuring that teachers:
 - take every opportunity to promote basic skills such as the use of punctuation and grammar
 - give pupils clear feedback that enables them to improve their work.
- Seek ways to improve the punctuality of pupils generally and the attendance of pupils who are regularly absent particularly.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- School leaders, staff and governors share a strong determination to see the school continue to improve. They know the pupils well and want the best for them.
- Swallow Dell is an inclusive school. Each pupil is seen as unique. Staff analyse any and all barriers that hinder pupils' development. They work closely with families and outside agencies to enable pupils to thrive. The school culture encourages and celebrates effort and 'doing the right thing'. Pupils' contributions to the school community are encouraged and recognised.
- School leaders' accurate analysis of the school's strengths and areas for improvement enables them to channel energy in the right direction. Leaders are effective. They have complementary skills and, as a team, bring out the best in one another.
- School leaders closely check the quality of teaching. They recognise teachers' strengths, and give helpful advice to help teachers to improve. Targets are set and progress reviewed regularly. Leaders' expectations of staff are rightly high. Staff responding to their online survey overwhelmingly agreed training is used to help them improve.
- School leaders' forensic analysis of information about pupils' progress enables them to spot pupils who are falling behind, and make the necessary changes to their learning. They meet with teachers regularly, and hold teachers to account for the progress of pupils in their classes.
- The management of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective. Each pupil's needs are accurately assessed, and funding allocated to meet them. The inclusion manager regularly meets with staff, parents and pupils to check that extra help is meeting these pupils' needs, and changes it if it is not. Parents are full and active partners in meeting the individual needs of these children.
- Much is done to support pupils and their families. Parents recognise and appreciate the support they are given by the school, including links to other agencies that can help them. However, the school has not yet enabled families of pupils who are regularly absent to overcome this barrier.
- Subject leaders' impact is good. Each individual's skills and expertise are used well, for example in computing. Each has a clear plan to improve their subject, based on an accurate analysis of what is working, and what is not.
- Staff morale is high and teamwork is strong. The overwhelming majority responding to the staff survey said that leaders ensure they are motivated, respected and effective. They also said they had a clear understanding of goals the school is aiming to achieve.
- The curriculum is effective because activities increasingly enthuse pupils, so they want to learn. Staff see this as a way of improving attendance, too. Occasional 'special' weeks give pupils many varied opportunities that enhance their learning. In 'boat week', for example, each class planned its own activities, such as 'pirates' and 'journeys', around this theme. Staff increasingly incorporate pupils' interests and ideas

in the activities they plan. Visits and visitors enhance learning.

- Staff's strong commitment to offer a good variety of extra 'clubs', and other learning experiences, enriches pupils' learning. For example, many pupils participate in dance. This year they wrote and performed publicly an interpretation of 'migration' that received acclaim.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Visitors from different faiths, for example, deepen pupils' understanding of those religions. Pupils celebrate and understand the diversity of family life.
- Pupils' understanding of British values is strong. They understand the importance of respecting one another and recognising that others sometimes hold different views. They show this trait in their daily lives in school.
- Additional pupil premium funding is used effectively. Funding promotes both academic and personal development well. Additional staff give extra help tailored to each pupil's needs. A range of extra staff, for example in art therapy, support pupils, too.
- Additional funds for primary school sports are used effectively. Pupils enjoy a wide range of activities, including trampolining. With local schools, staff share expertise and pupils participate in many events. The School Sports Apprenticeship Scheme is used effectively. Pupils know the importance of exercise to healthy living and the school tackles issues such as childhood obesity.
- The local authority is supportive of the school, for example by giving advice to help the school to set up the Nursery class.
- The vast majority of parents responding to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, would recommend the school to another parent. In discussion, parents explained how the school supports each individual well and personalises learning for them.

Governance of the school

- Governance is effective. As a group, governors are well organised, so that tasks are completed efficiently and effectively.
- Governors constantly strive, with school leaders and staff, to make the school better meet the needs of the local community. For example, they authorised investment to provide a Nursery class.
- As a group, they use each individual governor's skills and expertise effectively to support the governing body's actions and decision-making.
- Governors use the school's information about pupils' progress well to gain a clear view of how well pupils learn. They use other sources to check the information is consistent, and question school leaders if it is not.
- Governors' visits to the school provide an independent view and greater insight into how the school functions. Governors share their conclusions with one another, to maximise their value.
- Checks made by governors ensure that additional funding, such as the pupil premium, is used effectively.
- Governors' oversight of the performance of staff, including the headteacher, is

rigorous. Independent advice is sought and followed. Governors say that they sometimes struggle with recruitment, but that this does not stop them and the headteacher from tackling underperformance.

- Governors are aspirational. They say they want Swallow Dell to be 'the school of choice for parents, pupils and staff'.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Regular training, which is undertaken by staff and governors, includes all aspects of safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Training equips staff with the knowledge they need to detect pupils who are potentially vulnerable so that action to intervene can be taken. All staff receive appropriate, timely updates.
- Staff say they are confident in raising any concerns with the designated leads for safeguarding. Staff use systems effectively to carefully record and note concerns.
- Relationships with parents are strong. Parents fully understand, and support, the school's role. Parents will often seek help from the school.
- Relationships with outside agencies are very strong. Action is taken swiftly to address any concerns and seek help for vulnerable pupils and their families.
- Documentation is comprehensive. Checks on the suitability of staff, governors and volunteers are thorough.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The good quality of teaching reported at the previous inspection has been maintained. In their survey, nine in every 10 parents agreed their children are taught well.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are positive. As a result, lessons run smoothly and it is rare for learning time to be lost. Pupils want to learn; their attitudes to learning are good.
- Teachers deploy teaching assistants effectively. Teaching assistants benefit from good training. Their knowledge of the pupils they help, and what makes them 'tick', is beneficial. They give pupils the help they need to make progress.
- Staff promote pupils' speaking and listening skills well through the many opportunities provided for pupils to express themselves, give their views, listen to others and respond.
- Reading is taught effectively. Phonics is taught and reinforced at every opportunity, in younger classes particularly. The school has changed its approach to teaching more advanced reading skills, such as inference. This is beginning to make a difference, although some teachers' understanding is better than others.
- Mathematics is taught well. Very good subject leadership has identified and corrected gaps in teaching that affected pupils' achievement. For example, a refined approach to teaching calculation means it is much more effectively taught now than a year ago.
- The teaching of writing is much improved. In particular, teachers provide a good range

of interesting tasks that 'hook' pupils, especially boys, into the activities. However, teachers do not promote skills such as the use of punctuation and grammar as well.

- Teachers' planning enables most pupils to make good progress. Teachers in the same year group benefit from sharing ideas with one another. However, some activities for the most able, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, do not provide sufficient challenge for them.
- Teachers' feedback to pupils is generally good. For example, during lessons, teachers check that pupils understand, and go over the work if they do not. However, some teachers' feedback about pupils' writing does not give precise advice about how pupils can improve.
- Teachers provide homework that builds on learning done previously in school, or helps prepare pupils for future lessons. Nine in 10 parents responding to Ofsted's Parent View survey said that homework is appropriate for their children's age.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Nearly every parent responding to Parent View agreed their children are happy at school.
- Pupils' positive attitudes benefit their learning. Most are resilient and persevere, although some still find this difficult.
- Pupils accept responsibility very willingly. Staff offer numerous worthwhile opportunities for pupils to play a role and have a say in their school. Pupils embrace each and every one. Whether they are helping younger pupils in the playground, advising on computer problems, or running 'drop-in' lunchtime sessions for pupils who feel bullied, pupils are very keen to play a part in the life of their school.
- The sense of community is strong. In assembly, pupils are generous in their praise and celebration of one another's achievements. Play and lunchtimes are harmonious and pleasant parts of the day. Pupils enjoy the relatively large school grounds and the many opportunities for play provided by staff.
- Leaders and staff actively promote pupils' well-being. Staff and governors see this as a fundamental foundation on which pupils thrive and achieve.
- Before- and after-school provision is good. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, benefit from this social time and the fun activities they do.
- Pupils' understanding of how to stay safe is good. Parents agree. Nine in every 10 parents said their children feel safe in school. Pupils use equipment carefully and move around the school site safely. Staying safe on the internet is seen as being of paramount importance as the use of social media grows. A group including staff, governors, pupils and their parents helped formulate the policy and write it in language that is clear to pupils.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Four in every five parents responding to Parent View feel the school makes sure its pupils are well behaved.
- Pupils say the curriculum, and the way it is taught, is interesting so they try hard. They say they have higher expectations of themselves and each other through British values such as 'respect'. The small proportion who struggle to manage their own behaviour are well supported by staff, so they generally return to learning quickly. The few exclusions have been for appropriate reasons.
- Pupils say bullying happens, but that staff are quick to resolve it. Pupils spoken to said there is at least one adult in school who they feel they can talk to if something is worrying them. Nearly three quarters of the parents expressing an opinion in Parent View feel the school deals effectively with bullying.
- Attendance is below the national average. This is largely because a number of pupils are regularly absent from school. This can impact adversely on their learning.
- A relatively high number of pupils are late for class in the morning. This means that they have missed important learning, and also that they interrupt the learning of those who arrive on time.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The progress of pupils currently in the school is generally good. The school's checks on progress and the quality of work in pupils' books confirm this.
- Pupils' outcomes are improving over time. For the last three years, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the time they leave the Reception class has been increasing. In 2016, it was broadly the same as the national average. This trend of improvement is likely to continue this year.
- This stronger foundation is giving teachers in Year 1 and beyond more to build upon so pupils are beginning to achieve more at these ages, too. In phonics, for example, this is the case. Results of the phonics screening check have improved year-on-year over the last three years and are set to do so again this year.
- The progress of pupils currently in Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics is good and these pupils attain well. The school's checks on progress and work in pupils' books suggest a high proportion are working at or above age-related expectations for pupils of their age. A good proportion, too, are working at greater depth.
- The progress of pupils currently in Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics is also good overall. The school's checks show that these pupils are currently making faster progress than they have done over the last three years. Again, a good proportion of these pupils are working at age-related expectations for pupils of their age, but very few of the most able pupils are working at a more advanced level.
- In 2016, Year 6 pupils achieved national test results similar to most schools nationally. The exception was the most able pupils in writing, who achieved results well below the national average for their group. The weakness in writing meant that when the results of reading, writing and mathematics were combined, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard was well below the national average and no pupils reached the high standard.

- The improvement this year is largely due to changes in the curriculum and the way it is taught. In mathematics in Year 2, for example, the school participates in a project which ensures pupils have a thorough grounding in and understanding of basic calculation, so they are better able to apply what they know. In reading, pupils benefit from the better use of time in lessons. In writing, teachers plan many interesting and varied tasks for pupils to 'get their teeth into'. Pupils respond positively and do well. One pupil said, 'I like writing, I can write about anything in my imagination, put my own mind in it.' However, basic skills such as grammar and punctuation are not encouraged as much.
- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make good progress when teachers, for example in Year 6, plan challenging tasks for them to tackle. However, in most classes, activities planned for these pupils do not give them sufficient challenge, particularly to apply their skills and deepen their understanding.
- Disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to their peers, although often from lower starting points. As a result, they did not achieve as well as other pupils nationally in the previous school year. This year, teachers check their learning closely, lesson by lesson, and provide extra help by going over any misunderstandings or misconceptions. As a result, they are gaining ground more rapidly.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their individual starting points. They benefit from a combination of good support in class and bespoke programmes designed specifically to meet their individual needs.
- In the recent past, girls did better than boys, particularly in writing and mathematics. The school changed what was taught, and how it was taught. As a result, work in pupils' books suggests that the gap between boys and girls is now much narrower.

Early years provision

Good

- Overall, the provision in the early years is good. As a result, in both Nursery and Reception, children make good progress from their varied starting points.
- Children experience all areas of learning, both indoors and out, with a good balance of activities that adults lead and those the children choose for themselves. Interesting activities motivate children to be curious and creative. Children concentrate well and respond positively to staff.
- Children's starting points are assessed accurately. This information is used effectively, for example to provide extra help for those children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff continue to regularly check children's progress to keep track of how well they are doing and plan activities to help them achieve the early learning goals. Children's learning journals reflect their good progress.
- Staff take every opportunity to develop children's understanding, for example of phonics. They know when to step in and help, and when to step back and give children time to try to figure things out for themselves.
- Staff form an effective team. They know and understand their roles and the systems and procedures they are to use, including those for safeguarding. Statutory welfare requirements for the early years are met.

- Leadership is effective. Provision is improving and staff benefit from good training. Both contribute to the year-on-year improvement in outcomes for children.
- The relationship with parents is good. Parents say that the arrangements for their children to start school enable children to make a smooth transfer and a positive start.

School details

Unique reference number	133488
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10031473

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 and Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	436
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jeff Hawes
Headteacher	Clare Hollingsworth
Telephone number	01707 339079
Website	http://www.swallowdell.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@swallowdell.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–14 February 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is much larger than an average-sized primary school.
- The school operates a part-time Nursery class, five mornings a week. Although none were registered during the inspection, the Nursery class caters for two-year-olds.
- There are two classes in each year group, from Reception to Year 6.
- Roughly three quarters of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium funding is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who receive support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average.
- In 2016, the school met the government's floor standards, which are the minimum

expectations of pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

- The school offers before- and after-school care, five days a week.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited all classrooms. Some visits were conducted jointly with the headteacher or other members of the senior leadership team. In addition, the inspectors observed small groups of pupils being taught.
- The inspectors looked at work in pupils' books and listened to pupils read.
- The inspectors observed pupils in other activities and as they moved around the school and site.
- The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other leaders, teachers, other staff and governors. Inspectors also spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors met with pupils to discuss their experiences at school.
- The views of 67 parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account. The inspectors also held informal discussions with parents. The inspectors considered the views of 18 members of staff and three pupils who responded to their online surveys.
- The inspectors looked at a range of school documents and information. These included the school's development plan, checks on the quality of teaching, curriculum plans, minutes of meetings of the governing body, and pupils' behaviour and attendance records. The inspectors also looked at arrangements for safeguarding procedures, including relevant records.

Inspection team

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Vanessa Love	Ofsted Inspector
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Edel Gillespie	Ofsted Inspector

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