

Whitehill Junior School

Whitehill Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 9HT

Inspection dates

14–15 June 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- As national expectations have risen, the school has maintained good or better outcomes for pupils. A high proportion of pupils achieve above national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2.
- A proactive and accessible leadership team enjoys the full support of pupils, staff and parents. Parents are highly appreciative of the hard work of all staff at the school.
- Governors are actively involved in the life of the school. They are well informed about the pupils' learning and provide effective challenge and support to school leaders.
- Staff morale is high because of a shared drive and vision that ensures that pupils are well cared for and achieve well from their different starting points.
- The curriculum is rich and varied and creates memorable experiences that help to promote both learning and personal development. Through this, pupils have a well-developed understanding of the world.
- Pupils' behaviour is impeccable. Relationships between pupils and teachers are strong. As a result, the school is a welcoming, positive and friendly place in which to learn.
- Teachers plan activities that stimulate the interest of pupils. Pupils are keen to learn and enjoy lessons.
- Pupils benefit from teaching that is mostly good across subjects and year groups. On occasions, the quality of teaching requires improvement.
- Different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress because of the effective support they receive.
- Arrangements for keeping children safe are well managed and very effective. Pupils told inspectors that they felt safe in school and well cared for by the adults who work there.
- The standard of work in pupils' books is too variable across subjects and year groups and leaders have not ensured that the school's own marking policy is consistently applied.
- Teaching assistants are well trained and usually provide very effective support. Occasionally, teachers do not make best use of their skills to support the learning of pupils in lessons.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality of teaching, learning and assessment further by:
 - clarifying school policy on how teachers provide written feedback to pupils and ensuring that it is consistently applied
 - raising teachers' expectations of the quality of work in pupils' books in all subjects across the curriculum
 - improving teachers' deployment of teaching assistants so that their time is used effectively in lessons to support learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher's inspiring leadership has been instrumental in creating a vibrant and inclusive school which enables both staff and pupils to thrive. His firm belief in a philosophy of 'Profound Individual Growth' is reflected throughout the work of the school. Pupils enjoy coming to school, staff morale is high and 100% of parents who responded to the online survey Parent View supported the leadership of the school and would recommend the school to other parents.
- Leaders and governors have invested significantly in a highly effective programme to support more vulnerable pupils who struggle to succeed at school. Under the knowledgeable leadership of the inclusion manager, pupils become part of a year-long programme to build the skills that will allow them to succeed in mainstream school. Pupils who had benefited from this support told inspectors about the positive difference it had made to their lives at school. A proportion of the pupil premium funding is used to support this initiative.
- Leaders also use the pupil premium funding to provide swift intervention when need is identified by teachers. The availability of qualified teachers who do not have the daily responsibility for a class means that highly effective support keeps disadvantaged pupils on track to make at least good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Strong leadership of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities ensures that this funding is well spent. Regular reviews of pupils' progress mean that support can be adapted quickly to suit changing needs. Consequently, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well.
- Sport has a high profile in the life of the school. The primary physical education and sport premium is spent effectively to enhance the experience of all pupils. A sports apprentice and specialist coaches bring expertise to the teaching of physical education and enable the school to offer opportunities for pupils to try a variety of sports, such as lacrosse and golf. School sports teams are highly successful and competition for places in them is fierce.
- The wide and varied curriculum available to pupils is a strength of the school. This variety is celebrated through national awards such as the Primary Science Quality Mark, but the impact of this wider curriculum is also seen in classrooms and when talking to pupils about their learning. The school encourages pupils to share their own knowledge as well; for example, Year 3 pupils were taught about Ramadam recently by two Muslim pupils in Year 5. During the Brexit campaign and the recent presidential campaign in the USA, pupils held their own debates and had their say by voting in a mock election. Activities like these mean that pupils' understanding of the world they live in develops and matures as they move through the school.
- Other opportunities extend the curriculum beyond the school day and include music and drama activities and a flying club, as well as the chance to learn some Latin. Pupils also get the opportunity to experience a wide variety of day and residential trips, and Year 6 pupils were enjoying their visit to France during the inspection. Leaders ensure that all pupils get the chance to join in with these activities and so the vast majority of

pupils benefit from the richness of the extra-curricular programme.

- The local authority has provided effective support and challenge for the school, which has contributed significantly to the identification of some key areas for improvement in the school development plan. The headteacher uses the expertise of the local authority advisers wisely, for example, in supporting teachers as they embed the new national assessment system at key stage 2.
- School leaders regularly observe in lessons to monitor the quality of teaching. However, they have not, until recently, routinely checked the quality of work and feedback in pupils' books. The need to develop a more consistent approach to presentation and handwriting as well as improving the quality of written feedback by teachers was identified very late in the academic year. This has meant that the marking and feedback policy has not always been followed effectively and so the standard of work in pupils' books is inconsistent.

Governance of the school

- Governors provide good support and effective challenge to leaders. Membership of the governing body has been strengthened since the previous inspection. Governors bring a wealth of experience, such as finance and education, to their roles. This has helped them to ensure that the school is able to finance initiatives that have a positive impact on the progress of pupils, such as qualified teachers in support roles.
- Overall, governors have an accurate picture of the strengths of the school and the areas where improvement is needed. They have a clear understanding of national data and regularly check on the performance of different groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. They are also proactive in checking that extra funding, such as the pupil premium and the sports premium, is having a positive impact on the experience of pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders and governors with responsibility for safeguarding ensure that it is regarded as a high priority within the school. Leaders have created a safeguarding culture where pupils' well-being is a major priority and pupils are taught to look out for each other and care about what happens to others.
- All staff are well trained to react promptly to any concerns they might have. Adults know every pupil well and act quickly to ensure their safety and well-being at all times. Senior leaders are very proactive in their efforts not only to engage positively with the families of vulnerable pupils themselves, but also to make sure that support is in place from external agencies when it is needed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The relationships between pupils and staff are very positive and in all classrooms teachers' high expectations of behaviour are willingly met by pupils. Teachers and pupils treat each other with mutual respect and this creates a climate in which learning

can flourish.

- Teachers routinely provide opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively, encouraging them to work things out for themselves through carefully designed activities. In a Year 4 science lesson, pupils worked in teams to reproduce a drawing of the ear. This meant that pupils not only talked about their learning more but had to feed back to and, at times, correct their peers, which they managed effectively and positively.
- Pupils are given opportunities to read frequently and enjoy visiting the school library, where activities such as simply browsing the books or trying to complete a treasure hunt constantly engage them. Pupils who do not get the opportunity to read at home are provided with reading partners in school. Volunteers are trained as 'Reader Leaders' and not only listen to younger pupils read, but help to develop their understanding of what they read through careful questioning.
- Teachers display strong subject knowledge and so lessons beyond reading, writing and mathematics give pupils the opportunity to explore the wider world. This variety of work is seen around the school in vibrant displays on classroom walls and in activities such as 'The Big Dig' that Year 3 pupils were involved in during the inspection. Pupils were completely absorbed as they worked in teams to dig up part of the school grounds to unearth buried treasure. This activity provided a wealth of opportunities, not only to learn about archaeological digs, but to develop language and mathematical skills in a very practical and real way.
- Most teachers plan activities that quickly engage the interest of pupils and allow them to make at least good progress during the lesson. For example, in a Year 3 mathematics lesson, pupils were enthused by a multiplying game that introduced them to the topic of calculating and measuring perimeters. By the end of the lesson, because of a well-planned range of activities and effective questioning from the teacher, some pupils had made exceptional progress.
- The care that goes into planning the variety of activities that interest pupils in lessons is not always seen in the way that teachers respond to work that is produced in pupils' books. Too often, the school's marking policy is not consistently applied and pupils' effort is only briefly acknowledged with feedback that does not give them clear guidance on how to improve their work.
- In a very few lessons, teachers do not use time as effectively as they could. In these lessons, pupils make slower progress because learning activities are not well matched to their capabilities or they are not given sufficient time to apply their knowledge and practise their skills.
- Teaching assistants receive appropriate training to support the varying needs of pupils and were seen to be highly effective in the way they supported the learning of individual pupils. For example, one teaching assistant quietly checked that the pupil she was working with could answer the teacher's questions even though he was not confident enough to answer in front of the whole class. However, teachers do not always plan how to use their teaching assistant's time effectively and so opportunities to impact positively on the learning of pupils are lost.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The success of the school in promoting the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils through a universally understood core purpose is clearly demonstrated in the way the pupils behave. They are proud of their school, celebrate their differences and are mindful of the feelings of other pupils, their teachers and other adults.
- Pupils enjoy school and have positive attitudes towards their learning. Pupils work hard in lessons because they are keen to do their best. Even on the few occasions when pupils' interest was not engaged by the activities provided by the teacher, they tried their best to concentrate and complete them.
- Pupils told inspectors that school is a safe place and all parents who responded to the online survey Parent View agree that their children are well looked after while they are at school. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe outside of school. For example, Year 3 pupils confidently explained what they would do if they were worried about anything they encountered online. Pupils are also taught how to cope with the busy roads that surround the school. During the inspection, Year 5 pupils were taking their cycling safety tests.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- School records show that incidents of poor behaviour are rare but, even so, leaders still work to reduce them further. The headteacher and his team have invested a considerable amount of time to support children who struggle to manage their own behaviour, encouraging them to reflect on the consequences of their actions. Pupils were happy to speak to inspectors about the positive impact this work has had on their experience of school.
- Pupils show a mature understanding of what bullying is, the different types of bullying and how it can affect people. Pupils told inspectors that there is very little bullying in school but they would report it immediately because they know that teachers will 'sort it out'. Parents agree that their children are safe and happy at the school.
- Pupils told inspectors that behaviour in school is very good and usually a warning from the teacher is enough to make them rethink their actions. They said that very few pupils ever get as far as red on the behaviour management traffic light system. Observations in lessons during the inspection fully support this view.
- Pupils' enthusiasm for their school is demonstrated through high attendance figures as well as positive behaviour in lessons. Leaders are successfully reducing the absenteeism of a small number of disadvantaged pupils by working closely with vulnerable families and providing support to engage pupils in their learning.

- Playtimes and lunchtimes are well supervised but pupils manage their own behaviour at these times very effectively. 'Guardian Angels' make sure that nobody feels on their own or is left out of games. Pupils socialise and play together in the same enthusiastic but considerate way they approach their lessons.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils enter the school with attainment above that of other pupils nationally. In 2016, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected and higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2 was well above that found nationally. The progress that pupils made in their writing also placed Whitehill Junior School among the top 10% of schools nationally in 2016.
- Progress in reading and mathematics is in line with other schools nationally but is not as rapid and sustained as progress in writing. This difference in progress between subjects is still reflected in the topic work seen in pupils' books across areas such as science and humanities.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, are well supported and they made similar progress to other pupils nationally by the end of key stage 2 in 2016. A smaller proportion of them reached the expected standard in reading and writing in 2016, although in mathematics their attainment was close to that of other pupils. Leaders have effective support in place to address these lower outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- Numbers of disadvantaged pupils are low and so it is not useful to compare year groups. Currently, information provided by the school shows that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is carefully monitored and support quickly put in place when underachievement is identified. Because of this timely intervention, most disadvantaged pupils are making similar progress to other pupils and some are making even stronger progress.
- Well-tailored support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities means that these pupils are currently making good progress from their starting points.
- The most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics. Evidence in Year 6 pupils' books, for example, shows good progress across a range of writing styles. This is because in most lessons, but particularly in mathematics and writing, teachers ensure that activities provide the right level of challenge to help the most able pupils move their learning on quickly.
- All pupils are exposed to a wide and varied curriculum and clearly enjoy the more practical side of subjects such as science, geography and history. However, the standard of work in pupils' books across these subjects is inconsistent and so does not clearly demonstrate their individual progress or the way their understanding and skills develop over time.

School details

Unique reference number	117253
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10031602

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	243
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bill Walker
Headteacher	Steve Mills
Telephone number	01462 621313
Website	www.whitehill.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@whitehill.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–27 June 2013

Information about this school

- Whitehill is an average-sized junior school with two classes in each year group.
- The majority of pupils are White British and speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils who come from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational need or an education, health and care plan.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current 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 meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- The majority of Year 6 pupils and their teachers were in France on a school trip during the inspection.
- Inspectors observed pupils learning in every class across a range of subjects as well as the Year 6 pupils who remained in school.
- The inspectors looked at pupils' books and talked with different groups of pupils about their lessons and school life.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documentation relating to pupils' progress and the management of the school, including the arrangements to ensure that pupils are kept safe.
- Inspectors took account of the 135 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View), and spoke with parents as they arrived with their children at school in the morning. The views of staff were also considered, through the 12 responses to an Ofsted questionnaire.

Inspection team

Lesley Daniel, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Jones	Ofsted Inspector
Angela Savill	Ofsted Inspector

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