

# Millbrook Primary School

School Lane, Grove, Wantage, Oxfordshire OX12 7LB

## Inspection dates

20–21 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is too variable and not yet consistently good. In some classes, teachers' expectations are not high enough.
- Recruitment difficulties and staffing changes have hampered and stalled leaders' drive for improvement.
- Standards at the end of key stage 2 are below average and pupils do not make consistently good progress.
- The curriculum is broad and interesting but does not enable pupils to achieve well enough across a wide range of subjects.
- The most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged and too few pupils achieve the higher standards.
- Many subject leaders are new to their roles and do not yet play a full role in driving improvements in their subjects.

### The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher leads the school well and has brought about many improvements. She is ably supported by senior leaders, governors and the trust.
- Leaders and staff are highly motivated, and are united in their determination to improve the school.
- The curriculum is enriched with many opportunities for pupils to learn beyond the school day.
- Most pupils behave well. The school is an orderly environment and parents, staff and pupils speak positively about the school's approach to encouraging positive behaviour.
- Pupils enjoy school and feel safe at school.
- The early years is a strength of the school. Good teaching and leadership have ensured that children get off to a successful and happy start.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in reading, writing and mathematics so that it is consistently good or better by ensuring that:
  - teachers have high expectations of pupils' learning and achievement
  - teachers plan learning tasks which meet the needs of all pupils, including the disadvantaged and the most able
  - teaching more consistently and effectively engages and motivates all pupils to learn.
- Improve outcomes for pupils by ensuring that:
  - all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able, make consistently good progress in reading, writing and mathematics
  - more pupils, including the disadvantaged, achieve the higher standards and greater depth of learning.
- Continue to build on the good quality of leadership and management by:
  - completing and implementing the school's new curriculum plans to strengthen pupils' learning across all subjects
  - developing the role of subject leaders to enable them to drive improvement in pupils' outcomes
  - refining objectives for teaching staff so that leaders can robustly hold them to account.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Since joining the school in 2014, the headteacher's resilient, strong leadership has enabled the school to improve significantly following a period of decline and uncertainty. She has created a supportive, well-motivated team of staff, who are united in their ambition for further improvement. Parents, staff and governors speak highly of the headteacher and are unanimous in their support and appreciation of her work at the school.
- Senior leaders ably support the headteacher. They work effectively as a team and have secured substantial improvements to teaching and learning. They model good practice and provide clear guidance and mentoring to enable other teachers to improve their skills. As a result, although not yet good, the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils are improving.
- Leaders keep the quality of teaching and learning under review. Their regular observations and evaluations of pupils' work enable them to know where teaching is strongest and where it needs to be better. Effective coaching, mentoring and support have had a demonstrable impact on the quality of teaching and have improved outcomes for pupils. The headteacher has also set out a number of 'non-negotiables' to ensure greater consistency of teaching and learning across the school.
- Leaders' drive for improvement, however, has been hampered by a high turnover of staff, and by recruitment challenges. Over the last school year, there have been many staffing changes and temporary teaching arrangements for a number of classes. These stalled the good progress the school was making in improving the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.
- Senior leaders' detailed action plans set out clearly how they intend to make further improvements. These plans ensure that developments are appropriately focused on securing improvements to pupils' outcomes in English and mathematics. However, leaders acknowledge that appraisal objectives for teachers are not yet sufficiently sharp. For example, objectives are not precise enough to enable leaders to hold teachers to account fully for the progress pupils make.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is interesting and pupils are able to learn across a breadth of different subjects. However, curriculum plans do not clearly set out the skills, knowledge and understanding pupils need to develop in each subject and each year group. As a result, pupils' learning in many subjects is, at present, superficial. Many subject leaders are relatively new to their roles and do not yet contribute fully to the school's improvement.
- Out-of-school visits make a good contribution to pupils' learning and they benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities such as origami and Spanish. Older pupils also have the opportunity to attend a residential visit. During the inspection, many pupils spoke enthusiastically about their forthcoming residential visit, with one pupil commenting, 'I can't wait!' All pupils in Year 5 learn to play a brass instrument and some older pupils in the school benefit from instrumental lessons on the piano and drums.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is catered for well. The school's values are woven into everyday activities. For example, in singing assemblies, some songs include important values such as 'optimism' and enable pupils to reflect on overcoming obstacles.
- Discussions on complex themes such as utopia, slavery and servitude enable pupils to debate social and moral issues. Pupils' understanding about other cultures is enhanced through their history topics, such as Egypt, and through their learning about other religions. The election of the 'junior leadership team' enables pupils to develop an understanding of democracy. These opportunities ensure that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The inclusion leader provides effective leadership for this aspect of the school's work. She ensures that additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used well. She continually seeks to improve the quality of provision for these pupils. For example, she has organised additional training to develop English and mathematics specialists within the teaching support team. The school's strong, inclusive approach ensures that new pupils, including recently arrived pupils from overseas, quickly settle into school and become confident learners.
- Leaders ensure that the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used appropriately. Most of this funding is used to employ a home-school link worker who works closely with families to support individual pupils. While this support has had a demonstrable impact on improving pupils' well-being, some pupils do not make consistently good progress in their learning.
- The sports funding is used effectively. High-quality specialist coaching from sports leaders across the trust has improved the quality of physical education at the school. Pupils have many opportunities to compete in sporting events and show great enthusiasm for sport. When asked about what they like most about the school, a group of pupils were unanimous in exclaiming, 'We love sport!'
- Parents value the visible presence of the headteacher, who warmly meets and greets them on the playground at the beginning of the day. As one parent commented: 'The headteacher is very approachable and always seems to have time for everyone.' The headteacher regularly seeks parents' views about the school and is responsive to any concerns that they raise. For example, following the results of a parental survey, the school has developed a new behaviour policy.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governors and the trust provide effective leadership to the school. They visit regularly and take responsibility for key aspects of monitoring the school's work. Through their monthly meetings and focused visits, they ensure that agreed improvements are put into action in a timely manner. Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities well, such as ensuring the effectiveness of all safeguarding arrangements.
- Governors hold leaders to account fully and, together with leaders and the trust, have steered the school effectively through a period of significant change, to reach a point where improvements are increasing. Good-quality training and bespoke support from the trust have been pivotal in securing these positive developments to the school. Skilled leaders and staff from across the trust have been instrumental in helping the

school to improve. However, while governors and the trust have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses, their evaluations are over-optimistic.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Concerns about pupils are conscientiously logged and staff are alert and responsive to any changes in pupils' demeanour.
- Leaders have a very good knowledge of safeguarding procedures, the thresholds for referral and how to access the best support from outside agencies. When appropriate, they confidently refer on any concerns about pupils. Effective support from staff, including the home-school link worker, has brought about improvements for individual pupils and their families. Leaders keep careful records of any concerns about pupils' welfare; however, these are not as systematic as they could be to support leaders' strategic oversight.
- Pupils are given appropriate guidance to help them to stay safe online. The school's website safety page enables parents to find out more about how to help their children stay safe when using the internet. Prior to transferring to secondary school, pupils learn about cycle safety, as, once they have left Millbrook, many of them need to cycle to their new schools.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is not consistently good across the school. Although there have been improvements to the overall quality of teaching, it is still too variable from class to class. In many classes, strong teaching is enabling pupils to make good progress and achieve well. However, this is in contrast to some other classes, where the quality of teaching does not enable pupils to learn effectively. Teaching in key stage 1 is generally stronger than it is in key stage 2.
- Where teaching is good, teachers have high expectations of pupils and there is a positive climate for learning. In these classes, pupils settle quickly and focus very well on their tasks, trying their best. Routines are well established and there is a smooth transition between activities.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to pose interesting questions which help pupils to learn well. Learning tasks provide the right level of challenge and capture pupils' interests. In these classes, teachers check that pupils are on task and how well they are learning, and promptly address any errors or misconceptions. Teachers give appropriate feedback to pupils to enable them to know what has been successful and how to improve further. Checklists help pupils to review their own work, for example to check that they have included all the required elements in their writing.
- Where teaching is not good, teachers do not have high enough expectations. Learning is not consistently well matched to pupils' needs or prior learning, and there is insufficient challenge. As a result, some pupils do not commit to their learning and their work is not of good quality or sufficient quantity. Consequently, progress for some

pupils in these classes is not consistently good.

- Teachers plan many opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills in meaningful contexts across the wider curriculum. For example, the recent whole-school shipwreck topic on 'The Tempest' enabled pupils to write character descriptions, stories and survival guides. These opportunities enable pupils to expand their vocabulary and learn how to write in a wide range of forms and styles. However, particularly in key stage 2, there is insufficient attention given to pupils' punctuation and spelling accuracy which, in turn, impairs the quality of their writing.
- Reading is promoted well and pupils are proud of their attractive and well-stocked library. Good phonics teaching ensures that pupils get off to a good start with reading. Teachers ensure that pupils' reading books are appropriately matched to their needs and interests. In most classes, well-chosen texts and opportunities for discussion in small groups contribute well to pupils' reading and enjoyment.
- The quality of teaching is improving, and teachers have been supported by the introduction of the headteacher's 'non-negotiables'. These require teachers to ensure that pupils more regularly practise handwriting, spelling and reading, and strengthen the school's new approach to managing behaviour. They are ensuring greater consistency of approach to teaching and learning across the school.
- The school's new approach to teaching mathematics provides more opportunities for pupils to develop fluency in calculation. While it is too early to see the impact of this approach over time, there have been some improvements in pupils' calculation skills and confidence in number. Pupils' interest in mathematics has also been sparked by including regular 'beat-it' mathematics assemblies, which include a rousing song about overcoming challenges.
- Teachers carry out regular assessments to check how well pupils are learning. The school's assessment information shows that last year pupils made better progress. However, this does not match the work seen in many pupils' books, which indicates that progress over time has not been consistently good. These assessments of pupils' attainment were therefore, in some instances, over-generous.
- Across the school, relationships between adults and pupils are generally positive and respectful. Teachers show care and kindness towards pupils, so relationships are strong. Similarly, teaching assistants get on well with pupils and many make a good contribution to pupils' learning, as well as their social and emotional development. However, there are some classes where this support is not as effective as it could be.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils enjoy school and many speak enthusiastically about their learning and achievements. Assemblies and the opportunity to come together to sing and celebrate are uplifting occasions and contribute well to pupils' well-being. Pupils can talk about and explain the school's values, for example that 'cooperation' means being able to work well together.

- Pupils have a good knowledge about how to stay safe when using the computer by keeping to their 'smart rules'. They also know the importance of not sharing personal information with people they do not know, and that it is important to be responsible in their online behaviour.
- All pupils spoken to during the inspection say they feel safe at school and are confident that, if they are worried about something, they can speak to an adult in school. Pupils report that bullying occasionally happens, but that teachers deal with this well and resolve issues and that this is much improved. Pupils appreciate the effective way the headteacher resolves such incidents. However, some parents expressed concern about the way the school deals with bullying. Scrutiny of the school's records shows that leaders carefully record, track and deal appropriately with each incident of bullying.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Most pupils behave well and are respectful of each other and their teachers. Pupils are courteous and helpful and keen to tell visitors about their school. Most pupils move around the school sensibly, for example when entering and leaving the hall for assembly.
- During breaktimes, most pupils play sensibly together. Lunchtimes and playtimes are well organised and sports leaders help pupils to join in with ball games and develop their physical skills.
- Staff, parents and pupils have welcomed the new behaviour policy. They like the increased emphasis on praising and celebrating pupils' good behaviour and achievements. Some pupils report that, in the past, their learning in class had sometimes been unsettled by a few pupils who have challenging emotional difficulties. Leaders and most staff manage and support these pupils very well. Leaders also take appropriate steps to minimise interruptions to pupils' learning.
- School leaders have worked very effectively with families to improve the attendance of individual pupils who previously had poor attendance. As a result, the attendance of these pupils has improved, as has attendance overall, which is now similar to the national average.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- Outcomes require improvement, as not enough pupils make consistently good progress. In 2016 and 2017, achievement at the end of key stage 2 was below the standards expected for pupils at this age. Weak teaching and instability in staffing, over a prolonged period, have resulted in many pupils making insufficient progress across the key stage. As a result, these pupils underachieved at the end of key stage 2. Leaders are taking effective action to improve pupils' learning. Nevertheless, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain and limit pupils' progress.
- Pupils in key stage 1 achieved broadly average standards in 2016 and 2017. However, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standards in the Year 1 phonics screening check declined in 2017. Leaders' effective action has ensured that current

pupils are now making stronger progress and are on track to achieve well at the end of the year.

- Disadvantaged pupils achieved less well than other pupils and few disadvantaged pupils achieved the higher standards in key stages 1 and 2. In 2017, in key stage 1, no disadvantaged pupils achieved greater depth in any subject. However, a high proportion of this group of pupils also had special educational needs and/or disabilities. While there are some signs of improvement, progress is still not consistently strong across the school to enable disadvantaged pupils to achieve well.
- The most able pupils made good progress and achieved well in reading in the 2017 key stage 2 assessments. However, progress in other subjects was not as strong and, in some classes, the most able pupils were not sufficiently challenged to enable them to make consistently good progress.
- Overall, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made less progress than other pupils. However, many of these pupils have additional complex needs which impact on their learning and progress. Other pupils without these additional barriers made much better progress, although there remains some unevenness because of variations in the quality of teaching.
- Pupils enjoy reading and many of them talk excitedly about their favourite authors and novels. They apply their phonics skills well to read unknown words and can identify 'tricky' words. The most able readers read widely, with fluency and expression, and can infer meaning from the text. Pupils enjoy visiting the library, which offers a wide range of high-quality reading texts for pupils to choose from.
- Pupils' progress in writing is not consistently good in key stage 2. Some pupils make adventurous word choices and use complex and varied sentences to good effect. For example, in a piece of descriptive writing, one key stage 2 pupil wrote, 'Violent storms thunder over the land.' However, the quality of pupils' writing is often undermined by weak punctuation and spelling. This slows pupils' progress, so leaders have rightly identified this as an area for improvement.
- In mathematics, teachers' new approach to the development of pupils' number skills is beginning to have a positive impact on achievement. The school has ensured that pupils have regular time to practise and consolidate their learning of number facts and calculation. Pupils say that they enjoy mathematics and they respond well to the competitive element in the 'beat it' assemblies.
- The suitably broad curriculum ensures that pupils encounter a wide range of subjects and themes. Pupils apply their English skills appropriately in many subjects, as teachers include opportunities for pupils to read and write across the curriculum. However, pupils' learning in many subjects is superficial and they do not develop a sufficient depth of understanding. Leaders acknowledge this shortcoming and are implementing a new curriculum to ensure that there is adequate depth and progression in all subjects.
- Pupils enjoy music and older pupils thoroughly enjoy their weekly singing assemblies. They sing enthusiastically and develop a good understanding of different musical elements such as beat, tempo and pitch. They also learn about different musical forms such as singing in rounds.
- The close partnership with the local secondary school ensures that, socially, pupils are



well prepared for their move to secondary education. The extra reading group led by one of the secondary school teachers makes a good contribution to older pupils' learning. This also helps prepare pupils for the challenges ahead.

## Early years provision

**Good**

- The early years is a strength of the school.
- Good teaching and a nurturing, supportive and stimulating environment ensure that children get off to a great start. From below-average starting points, children make good progress and, by the time they leave Reception, achieve standards that are just above the national average.
- Very strong relationships with adults and effective transition arrangements enable children to settle quickly and become confident learners. Children are well behaved, play happily together and readily engage in conversation to explain what they are doing.
- Teachers plan and organise activities which sustain children's attention and help them learn well in all the early years areas of learning. Adults successfully harness children's natural curiosity and thirst for learning. They also provide plentiful opportunities for children to develop their early reading, writing and number skills. Phonics is very well taught and enables children to make an early start to their reading.
- Adults pose well-timed questions and use prompts to build successfully on children's previous learning. For example, when playing in the water trough, adults' careful questioning helped children to learn about concepts such as floating, sinking, full and empty. Through well-judged comments and questioning, adults also successfully extend children's vocabulary and language skills.
- The outside learning environment is a hive of industry. Children enjoy solving many problems, such as how to make a giant bridge. They enter wholeheartedly into these activities and become immersed in their 'pretend play'. As one child exclaimed, 'I'm making a bridge to get to the ark!' Children could not wait to get busy making 'cup cakes' in the mud kitchen and were delighted when they found a worm.
- The early years is led well. The knowledgeable and enthusiastic leader has a good understanding of the strengths of the setting and where further improvements can be made. She ensures that children's progress and development are carefully tracked through well-considered photographs and written observations. This enables adults to have a good understanding of each child's development to plan their next steps. The school also makes effective use of electronic 'learning journeys', which include contributions from both staff and parents.
- The partnership with parents is strong. Home visits, prior to children starting in Nursery, enable staff to get to know children and their families. This contributes well to children's settled start in the early years. Parents express high levels of satisfaction about the early years and are pleased with how happy their children are in the setting. As one parent commented: 'My child comes home keen to tell me about what he's been doing!'
- Children's happy, confident start to school and good achievement ensure that they are

well prepared for Year 1.

## School details

Unique reference number	141364
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10036789

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	433
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of the governing body	Brian Mitchell
Headteacher	Jane Ratcliffe
Telephone number	01235 764822
Website	<a href="http://www.millbrookschool.org.uk/">www.millbrookschool.org.uk/</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:head@millbrook.vale-academy.org">head@millbrook.vale-academy.org</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- Millbrook is larger than the average-size primary school. There are two classes in each year group. Early years consists of two classes in Reception and one Nursery class. Most children in the Nursery attend on a part-time basis. In addition, the school offers a small number of full-time nursery places.
- The school joined the Vale Academy Trust in December 2014 and is one of eight schools in this trust. Prior to joining the trust, the school was inspected in April 2013 and judged to be inadequate and subject to special measures.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is just above the national average.

- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is just below the national average. In the last year, there has been a considerable increase in the proportion of disadvantaged pupils at the school. This has risen from 12% to 23%.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average.
- The headteacher was appointed to the school in 2014. Since then, there have been many changes of staff.
- The school has a breakfast club and an after-school club for pupils, which are run by school staff.
- The school met the government floor standards in 2016, which are the minimum expectations for standards and progress for pupils in Year 6.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders and other teachers from the school.
- The lead inspector met with a group of governors, including the vice-chair of governors, and members of the trust, including the chief executive officer.
- Inspectors observed learning in all classes across the school. One lesson and an assembly were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read, looked at work in books and discussed pupils' progress with leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with pupils, and spoke to pupils in classes and on the playground during lunchtime and playtime.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents through discussions before school and through the 114 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 94 free-text responses.
- The views of staff were taken into account through the 43 staff survey responses and through discussions with teachers.
- Inspectors checked records and documentation relating to safeguarding, including pupils' behaviour and attendance and the recruitment checks made on the suitability of staff to work with children.
- Inspectors also reviewed a wide range of other documents, including: minutes of meetings; policies; action plans; records of performance management; curriculum plans; and evaluations of teaching and learning.

## Inspection team

Sue Cox, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Graham Marshall

Ofsted Inspector

Janis Rogers

Ofsted Inspector

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