

Alumwell Junior School

Primley Avenue, Walsall, West Midlands WS2 9UP

Inspection dates

23–24 January 2018

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 recently appointed executive headteacher has taken speedy and decisive action to bring about rapid improvements in a short period of time. In so doing, she has taken staff with her, so they are united in their determined pursuit for ongoing and ambitious improvement.
- Senior leaders and recently appointed managers lost no time in stepping up to their responsibilities. They provide purposeful training, ongoing support and regular checks on the effectiveness of teaching and learning initiatives.
- Governors fulfil their strategic role with commitment, knowledge and skill. They know in detail what the school does well, and the priorities for further development.
- Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and imaginatively engage pupils' interest in learning. They plan lessons carefully to ensure pupils' effective progress towards long-term goals.
- Teachers make effective use of regular tests to track pupils' progress against national expectations for their age. They identify and rectify any emerging gaps in pupils' knowledge.
- Teaching assistants provide good levels of support in classes and groups. They contribute knowledgeably to lessons, so that pupils succeed and make good progress over time.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress from their different starting points.
- Disadvantaged pupils receive good levels of well-informed, targeted support and, as a result, they make strong rates of progress in key subjects.
- Pupils are sensible, polite, caring and thoughtful. They look out for each other, and readily take on additional responsibilities. They are keenly aware of equality and fairness.
- Some subjects are not taught in sufficient detail. As a result, pupils do not consistently build on their breadth of knowledge. In addition, pupils do not apply their writing or mathematical skills across all subjects.
- Pupils have limited opportunities to consider a range of cultures in their locality or further afield.
- The most able pupils are not consistently challenged so that they achieve the higher standards of which they are capable.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop how the broader curriculum is taught by:
 - ensuring that pupils gain sufficient breadth of knowledge and depth of understanding in all subjects
 - providing appropriate opportunities for pupils to apply their writing and mathematical skills across a range of subjects.
- Enable pupils to extend their knowledge of other cultures and faiths by arranging visitors or visits to learn more about a range of celebrations, traditions and beliefs.
- Ensure that the most able pupils are provided with suitable challenge in lessons so they work at the highest standards.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The newly appointed executive headteacher took immediate and decisive action to improve pupils' rates of progress and standards of attainment. With the chair of the governing body, she commissioned an external review of pupil premium funding to identify how the difference in outcomes between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils, nationally, could be speedily reduced.
- The executive headteacher quickly defined the leadership roles of the two heads of school so they had clear and distinctive responsibilities. She lost no time in communicating her high expectations of staff and clearly set out where improvements were necessary.
- The executive headteacher, a national leader of education, has proved herself able to take staff with her on the journey of rapid improvement following a short period of decline, prior to her appointment. As a result, staff at all levels are keen to check that their teaching methods are effective and have a strong impact on accelerating pupils' progress. Together, they have created a determined and committed team which demonstrates a convincing capacity for continued improvement.
- The two heads of school have worked closely with the executive headteacher to review how well reading, writing and mathematics were taught. They clearly communicated where changes were needed, provided extensive professional development opportunities for staff and introduced additional resources. Leaders continue to check each teacher's success in implementing the new ways of working. Staff readily stepped up to the mark and enthusiastically take responsibility for the success of new initiatives.
- During the initial period of change, leaders identified considerable expertise within the staff and were able to appoint new subject leaders to take on management responsibilities. These managers have provided subject-specific support and helped to introduce new systems to check pupils' progress and improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments. They contribute to meetings with leaders and staff to review pupils' progress, and identify those pupils who need specific support. Their combined efforts are sharply focused on increasing the proportion of pupils who meet or exceed age-related expectations.
- The curriculum leader helps guide teachers' planning and heighten their expectations of pupils. Her scrutiny of pupils' work helps her to identify any individual subjects that are not yet taught with sufficient focus on pupils' knowledge or depth of understanding. Leadership has identified that pupils do not consistently apply their writing or mathematical skills in a range of subjects.
- Pupils demonstrate a mature understanding of the importance of respecting and valuing diversity. They explained, 'Everyone in our school works as a team.' They articulate a clear understanding of different types of prejudice, and explained the importance of equality, 'Girls can do whatever boys can do.' Pupils understand the importance of law, and they speak confidently about the principles of right and wrong. They have many opportunities to develop their experience of democracy in their work

on a range of different school councils.

- Leaders allocate pupil premium funding according to clearly identified priorities. Support staff receive training to provide pupils with carefully targeted help, which relates specifically to their needs. Leaders and managers carefully track and scrutinise pupils' progress. They ensure that pupils receive the right support at the right time.
- Leaders use the additional funding for those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities to appoint additional, well-trained support staff. The coordinator for special educational needs provides clear and well-developed systems to assess pupils' individual needs and inform specific support. She frequently checks the effectiveness of the available support and ensures that parents and carers and pupils contribute to regular reviews. The coordinator has established good links with external agencies so that expertise is utilised, wherever possible.
- The school sports funding is used well to employ specialist coaches and to purchase equipment and resources. School staff are now increasingly confident to teach a range of physical education skills and games. Pupils participate in a range of physical and sporting activities, and some have gained a high profile locally for their dancing skills. Pupils speak knowledgeably about the health benefits brought about by physical activity and the school has gained a number of awards in this area, including the school games mark at gold level.
- The school's vision for promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is embedded in its published values and day-to-day practice. Pupils are given time to reflect on their own thoughts, and empathise with the principles and beliefs of others. When writing for Remembrance Day, pupils showed a mature empathy for grief, loss and apprehension. They demonstrate a good understanding of right and wrong, and their social awareness is evident in the mutual respect they have for one another. Pupils learn about other beliefs and celebrations, such as Diwali, in assemblies. However, they have few opportunities to deepen their understanding of other cultures and faiths through visitors and visits to the local community and beyond.

Governance of the school

- Governors are highly committed to the school's success and as one leader said, 'They keep us on our toes!'
- Governors are actively involved in the work of the school and have a strong understanding of statutory responsibilities and strategic role. They test out what they are told by leaders, and seek clarity, insist on evidence and check on the success of new initiatives. Governors know the school's priorities and are focused on raising standards for all pupils.
- Governors are knowledgeable, skilled and clearly demonstrate a range of pertinent experience and expertise. One governor is a national leader of governance. Nevertheless, they exhibit no hint of complacency and have, as a consequence, commissioned an external review of governance to sharpen their skills further. As a consequence, governors are able to demonstrate that challenge is embedded in the culture of leadership at all levels.
- Governors take full advantage of available training and local expertise to keep up to

date. Leaders, managers and staff make good use of the available expertise within the Cadmus Federation to pursue continued improvement.

Safeguarding

- The school's commitment to ensuring that the safety and well-being of its pupils is rooted in its ethos of care. Staff at all levels understand their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. All staff and governors receive regular up-to-date training with regard to national and local priorities, and their knowledge is tested in follow-up questionnaires. Staff understand the range of indications for pupils' neglect and harm and are vigilant in identifying and referring any concerns they may have.
- School policies and posters provide detailed guidance on how to respond, refer and record any disclosure or concern. Detailed records of action taken within school and by external agencies are updated and reviewed regularly and leaders ensure that parents have access to a range of available family support.
- The designated safeguarding leader conducts health and safety checks on the premises, alongside those with appropriate expertise and experience. Staff undertake detailed risk assessments for visits and events, and further checks are made where individual pupils have specific needs.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers ensure that lessons inspire pupils' interest. Teachers plan together. They adopt a cohesive approach to teaching and share good practice.
- Adults plan activities which build progressively on pupils' prior learning. They give thought to whether given tasks are best achieved by pupils working alone, in pairs or as a class. Teachers explain the learning focus of any lesson so that pupils know what is expected of them.
- Teachers and teaching assistants show good levels of subject knowledge in lessons. Their explanations are clear and informative and their questioning probes pupils' understanding. They model speaking and writing well and expect the same from pupils.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are adept at checking on pupils' understanding and correcting any misconceptions. Adults quickly identify where pupils experience difficulty and invite pupils to share interesting approaches, methods or solutions. Teachers use appropriate opportunities to draw the attention of the class, so they can all consider and glean from one pupil's observation. As a result, pupils know that they can learn from each other, as well as from adults.
- Teachers are increasingly accurate in their assessment of pupils' progress within individual lessons and over a period of time. Their assessments are further enhanced by published half-termly tests to provide an objective measure of pupils' knowledge and understanding over time. The combination of assessments and tests enable teachers to plan a relevant sequence of lessons to enable pupils to meet longer-term targets.
- Teachers provide verbal and written feedback in line with the school's policy. Pupils know what their targets are, and what they need to do to improve. Pupils correct their

own errors and tend not to repeat mistakes in later work.

- Pupils have developed a love of reading and strongly advocate reading for pleasure, fantasy, empathy or factual investigation. They read with fluency and understanding. They appreciate recapping phonics skills to help them decode unfamiliar words.
- Teachers introduce pupils to an appropriate range of writing purposes and audiences. Pupils correctly and consistently apply their knowledge of grammar, punctuation and spelling to their written work, and take pride in their presentation. Pupils work hard to develop their ideas when writing descriptive text. Pupils confidently use a thesaurus to extend their choice of interesting vocabulary in order to engage the reader.
- In mathematics, pupils share and explain various methods of calculations. As a result, they appreciate that there is more than one way to reach a correct answer. As one pupil explained, 'Maths is like a mystery and you have to find the solution for yourself.' Pupils enjoy solving mathematical problems and exploring lines of enquiry. Pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts and their ability to explain their reasoning were enhanced in lessons where they handled mathematical resources. These opportunities enabled pupils to appreciate theory in practice.
- Teaching, particularly in English and mathematics, is frequently aimed at low- and middle-prior-attaining pupils and appropriate support is provided. Teachers introduce and explain new concepts well so that these pupils confidently tackle the activities.
- The most able pupils are not consistently taught the appropriate skills in writing to work at greater depth. In mathematics, the most able pupils spend unnecessary time listening to lengthy explanations of work that they can already do, and do not move on to suitably challenging activities quickly enough. As a result, opportunities are lost to stretch these pupils' understanding, deepen their thinking and acquire the skills to work at the highest standards.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils look out for each other. Some are members of the 'safety patrol', who perform duties at playtimes and before and after school. These pupils are chosen because they demonstrate high levels of responsibility, and their care for others is evident.
- Pupils explained confidently how to keep themselves safe online and knew how to report any concerns. Pupils say that they feel safe in all areas around the school. They understand different forms of bullying and maturely refer to a range of different types of prejudice. They said that they could not understand why anyone would behave in this way.
- Parents spoke positively about the school and believe the school is a safe, caring place where any problems are solved quickly.
- The family support worker has forged excellent links with parents. She provides them with ongoing updates about their children's personal needs or difficulties in school, and

how they can be helped at home.

- Pupils speak fondly of the school's two black labradors. One pupil explained that she stroked the dogs when she felt nervous or unhappy, and they made her feel settled and more comfortable. The pupils explained that the dogs liked everyone in school and behaved well in class.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are polite, sensible, responsible and caring. They show high levels of respect for adults and each other. In lessons, pupils are eager to learn, participate and succeed. They sensibly approach all aspects of learning with enthusiasm.
- Pupils told inspectors that the behaviour in school was good, and that they appreciated cordoned-off areas on the playground where they can safely play ball games.
- During playtimes, pupils play confidently and cooperatively. They share equipment, take turns and use the time well for additional exercise. They chat happily with friends and adults, and watch out for each other.
- Any misdemeanour is recorded in the behaviour log book. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on what led to any incident of misbehaviour and how they could prevent future incidents and to think of lessons learned from the experience. Pupils' comments are thoughtful and responsible. As a result, there are fewer lunchtime incidents than this time last year.
- Current attendance has improved to above the national average. Attendance had been below national figures for the last three years. The proportion of persistent absence has also reduced significantly.
- The school celebrates good attendance with rewards that pupils appreciate and are keen to earn. Staff are vigilant in pursuing reasons for absence, and leaders use all available options to challenge parents where attendance does not improve.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The executive headteacher ensured at the start that all staff understood that pupils' progress was everyone's responsibility. Staff now understand that Year 6 outcomes are dependent on all pupils achieving the best possible rates of progress.
- Pupils are tested every half term so that staff can accurately record and track pupils' progress. Pupils' current performance information shows an increased proportion of pupils making good progress across all year groups, in all subjects.
- Pupils' work provides evidence of strong rates of progress since the beginning of the school year, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. For example, writing in some pupils' books at the start of the school year was below the standard expected for their age. The work from September to now shows rapid improvement towards the expected standard. Their writing now includes appropriate levels of punctuation, expressive and descriptive vocabulary, and some are beginning to include paragraphs. Pupils in all year groups are able to apply the correct grammar, punctuation and

spelling expected for their age.

- New initiatives were introduced at the beginning of the school year to improve pupils' reading skills. For example, some pupils were unable to read unfamiliar words because their knowledge of phonics was insecure. This area of improvement is ongoing, but already pupils read more widely and are able to comprehend different types of text and interpret authors' intentions.
- In 2017, just over half of the disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 attained the expected standard for their age. While this proportion remains below that of other pupils nationally, the pupils made good progress from their low starting points.
- Adults provide well-targeted support for disadvantaged pupils, which has effective impact on their current progress. For example, the richness of their developing vocabulary was witnessed when one pupil described a fictional character as 'controlling him like a marionette'. Staff constantly review pupils' progress so that pupils quickly receive the specific help they need. Pupils understand their targets and they correct errors to improve the quality and accuracy of their work. Pupils are keen to succeed and rightly proud of their progress to date. School performance information demonstrates that the difference between current disadvantaged pupils' standards and those of their peers, as well as of other pupils nationally, is diminishing.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points because of the effective support they receive. Their specific needs are speedily identified, appropriate support is provided and their progress is kept under constant review. The gains made in pupils' reading ages are particularly strong.
- Published data for 2017 indicates that the rates of pupils' progress were significantly below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6. When these pupils entered Year 3 in 2013, the staff identified significant gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Their assessments were ratified by external checks. Given these starting points, pupils achieved rates of progress in line with the national figures, but were not able to make up the lost ground for them to be able to attain the standards expected for their age by the end of Year 6. Some of the pupils missed the expected standard by two or three marks.
- An average proportion of high-prior-attainers achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in 2017. However, the proportion of the most able pupils achieving the higher standards remained below the national figures.

School details

Unique reference number	104142
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10045488

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

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	362
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ross Doodson
Executive headteacher	Michelle Sheehy
Telephone number	01922 721391
Website	www.alumwelljuniorschool.co.uk
Email address	postbox@alumwell-j.walsall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 October 2013

Information about this school

- Alumwell Junior School is a three-form-entry junior school.
- The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is much higher than the national average.
- Most of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups, and a much higher than national proportion speak English as an additional language.
- The school meets the current government floor standards.
- The current executive headteacher was appointed in September 2017. She is a national leader of education.
- A governor is a national leader for governance.
- The school belongs to the Cadmus Federation of schools, based in Walsall.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all year groups. They were accompanied by senior leaders for the majority of these observations. Observations of other aspects of the school's work were also made, such as, for example, assemblies.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and managers, including those responsible for safeguarding and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke to 33 parents at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors met with pupils to discuss a range of topics and looked at pupils' work in books and displays.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including school policies, self-evaluation, school improvement plans, current records of pupils' progress and information about attendance, behaviour outcomes and the school's website.

Inspection team

Deana Holdaway, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Chris Minton	Ofsted Inspector
Devinder Riat	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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