

Whitchurch Combined School

North Marston Lane, Whitchurch, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP22 4JG

Inspection dates

26–27 June 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
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since their arrival, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have wasted no time in driving improvement in the school. They have quickly identified the areas that need strengthening and put in place measures to ensure that this happens. This is a continuously improving school.
- Governors are knowledgeable and ambitious for the school and its pupils. They enjoy strong, collaborative relationships with leaders, and visit the school often to see for themselves the changes that have been made. Governors' checks on safeguarding are regular, well judged and rigorous.
- Teachers and teaching assistants know their classes well. They guide pupils skilfully, asking probing questions to test pupils' understanding. Their work to support pupils who fall behind, including those who are disadvantaged, is particularly effective.
- Pupils behave well and enjoy strong relationships with their peers and adults. Pupils are tolerant and respectful. This is a happy school.
- Pupils make strong progress in English. Staff have high expectations, and support pupils to write interesting and considered texts, which demonstrate their strong understanding of grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Recent improvements in the teaching of mathematics have helped pupils to gain a better understanding of the basics. Pupils now use their calculation skills to solve complex problems in mathematics. As a result, they make strong progress.
- Leaders undertake a range of activities to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They use this to provide staff with feedback and support to improve their teaching. Nevertheless, these activities are not always reviewed systematically, meaning that leaders do not use all the available information when evaluating staff and school performance.
- The curriculum provides pupils with opportunities to learn and develop in a range of subjects. However, standards in the wider curriculum are not consistently as high as those in English and mathematics.
- The early years provision is well led and well managed. Recent changes to the transition arrangements have been positively received by parents, pupils and children. Children make a strong start to their early education and are well prepared for Year 1.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by refining systems for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Improve pupils' outcomes by ensuring that their achievements in all subjects, including science, match the high standards in English and mathematics.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since starting in September 2016, the headteacher has worked tirelessly to improve all aspects of the school. She has recruited and developed a strong and capable team of staff who are driven to raise standards. Parents appreciate the efforts of leaders to maintain the 'family feel' of the school while addressing the weaknesses that need attention. One parent summarised the thoughts of many, noting: 'My son has loved this school from day one. He's very happy; I'm very happy.'
- Middle leaders are well trained and highly effective. After a dip in mathematics results last year, they carefully analysed pupils' assessment information, noting that calculation was a weakness for some. They redesigned the mathematics curriculum, placing a greater emphasis on basic numerical skills, and retrained staff and parents to ensure that everyone was clear about methods and expectations. As a result, teaching and learning in mathematics have been revitalised, leading to improved outcomes for pupils.
- Systems for tracking the performance of pupils have been refined in the last year. This information is closely monitored by leaders and governors, who use it to identify pupils who need extra support, and ensure that they get the help they need. As a result, pupils who fall behind catch up quickly.
- Leaders use a broad range of monitoring activities to gain an understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the school. Staff appreciate the useful feedback, which they use to improve their performance. Leaders recognise that they need to refine systems for collating and reviewing this broad range of evidence to improve standards further.
- The small number of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are supported well. The school gives equal attention to their academic progress and their well-being. Leaders actively seek solutions to overcome barriers to pupils' learning. They ensure that pupils receive a range of appropriate interventions and targeted support. As a result, most pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make strong progress. Further work is needed to embed the systems used to monitor the impact of provision for these pupils.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used well to improve their rates of progress. Funding has provided additional teaching time, which helps pupils to understand concepts they may have found tricky, or to extend their learning further. Disadvantaged pupils make strong progress throughout the school.
- The curriculum provides ample opportunity for pupils to develop their core academic skills and advance their ability and understanding of sports, music and the arts. For example, pupils in Year 2 studied the artwork of Bridget Riley, mimicking her style, and writing interesting poems to describe her works. Standards in writing, reading and mathematics are consistently strong. Nevertheless, the quality of pupils' achievement in science, religious education and humanities remains inconsistent.
- Pupils are encouraged to respect and celebrate difference. They discuss faith, religion, gender and sexuality with care, sensitivity and genuine curiosity. The inclusive and

tolerant ethos of the school prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.

- The local authority provides useful external validation to moderate leaders' judgements and help the school to improve further. Local authority officers hold regular business meetings with leaders, which have helped them to evaluate their actions and plan for further improvement. As a result, the quality of improvement planning and implementation has improved.

Governance of the school

- Governors are knowledgeable and skilled. They receive useful information from leaders about the performance of pupils and arrangements for safeguarding. Importantly, governors remain appropriately curious and check the work of leaders by visiting the school often to gain first-hand information on the quality of education the school provides. Governors are well placed to secure further improvement.
- Governors have provided strong support for the school, recruiting a skilled headteacher and deputy headteacher. They offer this newly formed leadership team the right balance of training, support and challenge.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff are well trained to identify and report any concerns they may have about pupils' welfare. Leaders take swift and robust action to help children and families when concerns arise, seeking and securing the help of external agencies when appropriate.
- Statutory checks on staff are made in a timely and methodical fashion. All staff, including those who are newly recruited, are given extensive induction training so they get to know the school's safeguarding processes quickly. The weekly safeguarding meeting and regular interviews conducted by governors keep safeguarding at the forefront of everyone's minds.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. They learn to use the internet responsibly and know how to report concerns when they arise. Pupils in Year 6 explained that if they found inappropriate content online, they would simply turn their tablet computer face down and tell an adult. Pupils learn to stay safe in the sun, particularly children in Reception, who proudly wear an array of lustrously coloured caps when outside. When the nights draw in, pupils know to wear bright colours and reflective clothing; this is a key piece of learning for residents of this rural community.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers know their pupils well and ask sharply focused questions to test pupils' thinking. Using their answers, teachers tailor pupils' work, offering more support where appropriate. As a result, tasks are closely matched to pupils' starting points.
- Teachers possess strong subject knowledge, particularly in English and mathematics. This was typified in a Year 1 phonics lesson, where the teaching helped pupils to modify vowel sounds when words, such as 'home', end with an 'e'. Teachers use their

knowledge to offer pupils useful guidance and to simplify complex problems.

- Pupils across the school develop strong number and calculation skills. Teachers help pupils to apply these skills by giving them a range of challenging and interesting problems to solve. Pupils can explain their mathematical reasoning, and many are now starting to record their thinking.
- Teachers and leaders track pupils' progress carefully. When pupils' performance dips, it is quickly noted by teaching and support staff, who offer useful support to help pupils catch up. Notably, this support is available for pupils of all abilities. As a result, pupils who fall behind, including those who are disadvantaged, make strong progress to catch up with their peers.
- Pupils collaborate well in lessons. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson on converting weights and measures, pupils worked with their partners to discuss their solutions and help each other out when they were stuck. Pupils readily share and question their own and others' opinions and use this information to help them overcome challenges in lessons.
- Reading is taught well. Teachers guide pupils to understand the links between letters and sounds; skills which form the cornerstone of early reading. As a result, pupils can access increasingly complex texts and develop positive attitudes to reading.
- Pupils write well for a range of purposes. For example, in history, Year 6 pupils compared the modern day to Anglo Saxon Britain. Pupils write with confidence, using appropriate punctuation and language to explain their thinking, tell a story or explain a concept. Nevertheless, standards in other subjects including science are not as high as those in English and mathematics.
- In most lessons, pupils work with focus and concentration. However, in a minority of lessons, pupils become distracted when working independently, which slows their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils and staff enjoy warm relationships. Staff know the pupils well and use this to help nurture and guide their development. For example, lunchtime supervisors are trusted by pupils and help them to find friends to play with at lunchtime. This is a happy and harmonious school.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. The school's ambition to promote pupils' character development was typified in Year 3, where pupils shared their worries, symbolising them by using beads strung on to a necklace. When complete, pupils offered sensitive and sensible suggestions to their peers on how to deal with concerns and anxieties. They then returned to the necklace and agreed that they had found solutions to their problems.
- Pupils show respect and tolerance to those from different cultures and those who have different abilities. They know to 'respect everyone', as noted by a Year 2 pupil, and

that 'everyone is the same on the inside'. Pupils enjoy and achieve regardless of their race, religion or ability. Pupils in Year 6 explained, with great sensitivity and respect, how they learned that people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender deserve, and are entitled to, the respect and support of their community.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils contribute readily to lessons and, when working, do their best to complete their tasks. Pupils debate topics with respect, listening to the views of others. As a result, lessons are typically productive and enjoyed by pupils.
- Behaviour at playtimes is positive. Pupils enjoy the use of the well-maintained grounds and equipment, such as the field, climbing equipment, play trail and picnic benches. Pupils report that bullying is rare and, when they do occasionally fall out, staff are good at tackling this.
- Leaders monitor absence closely and have imbued the whole school community with high expectations of pupils' attendance. Families receive useful support to help establish positive attendance patterns from the off. As a result, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, attend school regularly, and levels of persistent absence are half that seen nationally.
- Monitoring of pupils' behaviour is thorough and rigorous. While some low-level incidents remain, these are tackled proactively by leaders, who offer pupils support to recognise their mistakes and ensure that they are not repeated. Pupils throughout the school felt proud of their own behaviour as well as the behaviour of others.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In 2017, leaders noted a dip in pupils' mathematics outcomes. Leaders analysed pupils' attainment information and identified weaknesses in pupils' understanding of key skills, such as calculation. Using this information, they provided additional opportunities for pupils to develop their mathematical fluency and number skills. As a result, pupils' progress has accelerated.
- In 2017, lower-than-average proportions of Year 6 pupils attained age-related expectations in writing. A sharp focus on punctuation, grammar and spelling, combined with raised expectations, has accelerated the rates of progress pupils make in writing. Consequently, most pupils write at the expected standard, and increasing proportions attain a high standard.
- The most able pupils make strong progress because they are given challenging work. For example, in Year 4, pupils considered different methods for drying damp socks, writing at a high standard to explain their scientific thinking. Nevertheless, variable standards in other subjects including science are evident in all year groups. As a result, pupils do not always make the progress in these subjects that they are capable of.
- Disadvantaged pupils are supported well and typically make similar progress to their peers in school. Close tracking of these pupils' achievements, aligned with effective

challenge and support (often through additional teaching), enables them to succeed.

- Pupils who fall behind are well supported to catch up. Teachers use assessment information to identify pupils who struggle to achieve their potential in lessons, and skilled teaching assistants support these pupils to correct misconceptions and improve their work. As a result, dips in pupils' performance are quickly reversed.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years leader is knowledgeable and skilled, evaluating the provision accurately and using this information to improve the setting. For instance, transition arrangements were refined last year, helping parents, children and staff to get to know each other in a more positive, relaxed and developmental fashion. Parents are delighted with the new home visits, and feel that their children make a great start to their formal education.
- Children enter the early years with levels of development that are broadly typical for their age. By the time they reach Year 1, a high proportion of these children, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve a good level of development. This represents strong progress from their starting points.
- Safeguarding arrangements in the early years match the strong procedures in the main school. Children learn to look after themselves and their bodies. They play sensibly and safely, showing an appropriate trust and attachment to their key adults. Staff in the early years work closely with families and outside nurseries to get to know the children and offer useful support to families when they need it.
- Staff use their knowledge and careful observations of children to guide and teach children in the early years. They help children to speak clearly and to use their phonics skills to write interesting, simple sentences. Teachers and teaching assistants encourage children to record their thoughts and ideas by writing them down. Exciting themes and constant encouragement mean that writing is a strength in the early years.
- In the early years, children learn useful routines and make a strong start to their full-time education. Children work hard and focus on their play, relationships, conversations and activities. As a result, children are well prepared for the more formal education they will receive in Year 1.

School details

Unique reference number	110333
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10046299

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
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andy South
Headteacher	Rachel Pickup
Telephone number	01296 641 418
Website	www.whitchurchcombined.co.uk
Email address	office@whitchurch.bucks.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 June 2008

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is lower than the national average.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been several changes in staffing, including the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- The school meets the current government floor standards.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 15 lessons; the majority of the observations were conducted with senior leaders.
- Inspectors met with parents during the inspection to gather their views on the school.
- A range of the school's documentation was scrutinised to gather information on: leaders' evaluation of the school's performance; systems for managing the performance of teachers; the behaviour and safety of pupils; safeguarding; the progress and attainment of pupils and curriculum leadership.
- The lead inspector scrutinised the school's website to evaluate the quality of information for parents and whether the school meets statutory publishing requirements.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils to gather their views, and heard pupils read.
- Meetings were held with school leaders, a range of teaching staff, pupils from all year groups, representatives from the governing body and a local authority officer.

Inspection team

Daniel Lambert, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Tracey Bowen

Ofsted Inspector

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