

Fir Tree Primary School and Nursery

Fir Tree Lane, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 2RA

Inspection dates

31 October–1 November 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders and governors have not ensured that the school provides a good standard of education. Pupils often do not make good enough progress from their starting points. They attain below the national average.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is variable. Sometimes, teachers are not accurate in their assessments of how pupils are achieving. Staff often do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. Work provided is not always challenging.
- Leaders do not always hold teachers fully to account for pupils' progress. Phonics teaching is variable. Pupils are often not given enough chances to write at greater length.
- Middle leaders, including those who have responsibilities for special education needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, are not held well enough to account for the progress pupils make.
- Some parents and carers are not fully supportive of the school. They have concerns about the frequent changes in teaching staff.
- In some lessons, low-level disruption affects pupils' learning. Pupils are not always helped by staff to be successful learners.
- The local governing body does not receive clear enough information from the school about how pupils are progressing. Governors do not always hold leaders to account for pupils' outcomes.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have started to have a positive impact on improving the school. Pupils' progress in mathematics and reading is improving.
- Behaviour in the playground is much improved. Attendance is in line with the national average.
- The trust has provided effective support to the school during a period of staffing turbulence.
- Children get off to a good start in the early years. They make strong progress and enjoy their learning because the leadership of teaching is stronger than elsewhere in the school.
- The quality of teaching in Years 1 and 6 is stronger than in the rest of the school. Pupils in these classes make better progress than others.
- Pupils in the specialist provision make good academic and personal progress.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders always hold teachers fully to account for the progress that pupils make
 - middle leaders, including those with responsibilities for SEN and/or disabilities, are more accountable for the progress of pupils
 - parents increase their confidence in the school to support their children’s education
 - the local governing body receives clearer information about pupils’ attainment and progress from the school’s senior staff so they can hold them fully to account for pupils’ outcomes.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that teachers have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve by ensuring that:
 - teachers are always accurate in their assessments of pupils’ attainment and provide challenging work that meets pupils’ needs
 - phonics teaching helps pupils to read difficult words
 - pupils write at greater length to deepen their understanding.
- Improve the personal development and behaviour of pupils by ensuring that:
 - pupils always behave well
 - teachers address pupils’ misconceptions and help them to become successful in their learning.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- There has been a decline in the quality of education since the previous inspection. Pupils' progress has slowed because the quality of teaching is too variable. Pupils do not always behave well in class.
- Senior leaders do not yet hold teachers fully to account for the progress that pupils are making. Some middle leaders, including those who oversee SEN and/or disabilities, are not yet held fully to account for the progress of pupils within their areas of responsibility.
- One of the reasons for the decline has been due to staffing turbulence. Nevertheless, many of the initiatives started by the trust and new associate headteacher are starting to have a positive impact. For example, pupils now make stronger progress in reading and mathematics across the school.
- Parents have mixed views about the school. Some are unhappy about the changes to teaching staff. But parents recognise that there have been recent improvements. A typical comment by a parent was, 'We are pleased with the new associate headteacher and the initiatives recently brought in.'
- The executive headteacher has made sure the school has received effective support from the trust. This has led to recent improvements in the quality of teaching. Staff morale has improved. Support from the trust has also led to improvements in pupils' progress in mathematics.
- Leaders intend that the curriculum will prepare pupils well for adult life. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about a recent design technology challenge, where they had to design a bridge to support various weights.
- Pupils enjoy a broad range of experiences due to effective links with the other two trust schools. For example, staff from the secondary school provide pupils with specialist teaching in French and music. Pupils enjoy participating in the trust's choir and dance festival. These activities have a positive impact on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school makes effective use of the sports funding for physical education (PE). As a result, a greater number of pupils take part in sports than in the past. Pupils enjoy playing in the West Berkshire sports network. Girls achieve great success in football tournaments. Currently, they are the second-best girls' football team in the county. There is a strong focus on teaching pupils to stay healthy. Pupils enjoy running a mile at breaktimes, for instance.
- Leadership of the specialist resourced provision is effective. Pupils receive bespoke support where required. Pupils learn in both the provision and in the mainstream classes. Parents say how delighted they are with the help and support that their children receive. A typical comment was, 'My child is encouraged to work hard and try his best; he knows that the small team will look after him well and he is finally settled. We are so happy for the hard work and effort that the team have put in.'
- Leaders check the school's use of the pupil premium funding very well. The impact is

that disadvantaged pupils are now making stronger progress.

- Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Self-evaluation and school improvement documentation are accurate and thorough. There are clear milestones for measuring the impact of actions. Policies are now applied consistently.

Governance of the school

- The local governing body does not hold leaders fully to account for the progress that pupils are making. Minutes of the local governors' meetings show that their questions about pupils' progress are too broad. One of the reasons for this is that the information the school provides about attainment and progress is not detailed enough.
- Local governors have a clear desire to improve the school. They visit the school regularly. Local governors are rightly proud of the school's inclusive nature and the new specialist provision.
- Trustees have an accurate view of the school. They have ensured that the school has received appropriate support from the other trust schools. For example, teachers from these schools are seconded to this school when there is staff absence.
- Governors take their responsibilities for safeguarding seriously. They have had appropriate training to develop their understanding of key issues.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders are tenacious in ensuring that pupils are safe. Staff follow up concerns quickly and there are strong links with a range of external agencies.
- The school's single central register, which checks on adults working with children, meets requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Variable teaching has affected pupils' attainment and progress over time. Despite recent improvements, teaching and learning are not yet good. Teachers' expectations about what pupils can achieve are often too low. Some parents consider that 'the school could do much better at getting the best out of the pupils'.
- In some classes, pupils are not given enough chances to write longer pieces of work. This means they do not always consolidate their skills effectively. Teachers have responded well to the extra mathematics support provided by the trust. Teachers now set work which is more challenging. It enables pupils to develop their fluency skills well.
- The school has recently introduced a new assessment system. It is beginning to have an impact. Teachers are just starting to use the information to identify where pupils have gaps in their knowledge. But some teachers are not yet recording pupils' progress accurately.

- Teaching in the specialist provision is effective. Dedicated staff provide sensitive and caring support. There is a clear focus on inclusion, and pupils join in the mainstream classes regularly.
- In some year groups, teachers use questioning well. This helps pupils to make sense of their learning. In Year 5, for instance, effective questioning helped pupils to understand how to use a thesaurus.
- Teaching assistants provide effective support for pupils. They work with individuals or small groups to help pupils to access their learning.
- In some year groups, such as Year 1 and 6, pupils make stronger progress because the teaching is planned well and pupils' learning is deepened.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils do not always understand how to be successful learners. Some say they do not know how to improve their work.
- Pupils report that there were some issues with bullying last year. They say that it is now much improved, although the occasional incident still occurs. Pupils say that they feel safe and that their teachers are good at sorting out issues quickly.
- The personal development and welfare of pupils who are in the specialist provision is good. Staff ensure that these pupils' anxieties are well managed. This ensures that they feel more secure and ready to learn.
- The breakfast club provides a calm and welcoming start to the school day.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- In some lessons, there is a low level of disruption. Pupils are sometimes too noisy. They do not always concentrate on the task in hand. Sometimes, pupils can take a long time to settle to the work that has been set. Pupils say that behaviour is improving from last year.
- Leaders have recently introduced a new system for monitoring pupils' behaviour. This is starting to have an impact. For example, leaders can now identify how behaviour has improved in the playground.
- Pupils' attendance is around the national average. The school's educational welfare officer works hard to ensure that pupils attend well.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' progress declined in the past two years as a result of the variable quality of

teaching. It is now starting to improve.

- The proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics reading check is below the national average. This is because teachers are not always providing pupils with the necessary skills to read difficult words.
- Pupils who left Year 6 in 2018 attained below the national average. Scrutiny of current pupils' books showed that, despite some improvements, progress is still variable in the different year groups. In some classes, pupils do not write enough longer pieces of work to deepen their understanding.
- In 2018, few pupils reached the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics. But in mathematics, more pupils are now on track to do well. This is because work provided is much better matched to these pupils' abilities.
- Groups of pupils, such as disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, usually make the same progress as their peers. In some classes, such as Year 1 and 6, they make stronger progress.
- Pupils have positive attitudes towards reading. They read confidently and with expression. New strategies to improve pupils' progress have had a positive impact. Pupils now read a greater range of fiction and non-fiction books.
- In history, pupils develop a good understanding of the significant events of the Second World War. They display a thoughtful understanding of the conflict. For example, a pupil wrote, 'poppies reminding us of the lives sacrificed'.
- From low starting points, pupils in the specialist provision make good academic, social and emotional progress.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years is stronger than the rest of the school because leadership is stronger and the quality of teaching is good. Plans for improvement are incisive and accurate. Leaders have a clear view of the strengths and areas still left to develop.
- Children's skills and abilities on entry into both the Nursery and Reception classes are below those typical for their age. Children make good progress in the early years. The proportion of children who reach a good level of development is in line with the national average. As a result, children are well prepared for their learning in Year 1.
- Teaching is effective. Activities in both the Nursery and Reception classes are well planned to excite and enthuse children in their learning. Teachers' questioning deepens and extends children's learning.
- The outside area is very well planned. Adults work well with children to help them explore the range of activities offered, such as the mud kitchen and construction area. Children enjoy using and sharing dressing-up clothes when using the stage. These experiences develop children's communication and social skills well. Behaviour is good.
- Funding to support disadvantaged children is well used. These children usually make good progress from their starting points.
- Parents are very positive about the early years. They say that it is a friendly environment where their children feel safe. Parents feel fully involved in their children's

learning.

School details

Unique reference number	139081
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	10046044

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	192
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Sheila Loy
Executive headteacher	Charlotte Wilson
Telephone number	01635 42129
Website	www.firtreeschool.co.uk
Email address	office@firtree.newburyacademytrust.org
Date of previous inspection	25–26 September 2014

Information about this school

- Fir Tree Primary is part of the Newbury Multi-Academy Trust. There are two other schools within the trust, a secondary school called Trinity School and Speenhamland Primary School. Each school is run by an associate headteacher. An executive headteacher oversees all three schools, she is also the chief executive of the trust.
- The management of the trust consists of a board of directors. Their role is to oversee the strategic direction of the schools. The school also has a local governing body. It is responsible for the day-to-day running of the school, including the monitoring of teaching and learning.
- A specialist provision for pupils who have autism spectrum disorder opened in 2017. It consists of two classrooms, a sensory room and a therapy room. There are currently five pupils on roll. The provision is registered for 12 pupils between the ages of 3 and 11.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average.

- The school has been through a period of significant staffing changes since the last inspection. There have been three associate headteachers in rapid succession. The current associate headteacher started working at the school on a part-time basis last term. They became full time in September 2018. There have been a lot of changes to the teaching staff in the past two years.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is similar to that found in most schools.
- Children in the early years are taught in a part-time Nursery and a Reception class.
- The school runs a breakfast club.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of lessons and conducted learning walks in all year groups. Many observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about what it was like to be a pupil at this school. They looked in their books and listened to them read.
- Inspectors reviewed 26 parent responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. There were also informal meetings with parents at the end of the school day. Inspectors reviewed the 23 responses to the staff inspection questionnaire.
- Discussions were held with the executive headteacher, the associate headteacher, other leaders and staff. There was a meeting with the chair of the trust and a member of the local governing body.
- Inspectors examined a range of documents. These included development plans, information about pupils' progress, the school's checks on the quality of teaching and reviews of its own performance. Records of pupils' attendance and behaviour and safeguarding documentation were also checked.

Inspection team

Liz Bowes, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Robert Howell

Ofsted Inspector

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