

Ferndale Primary School

Ferndale Avenue, Great Barr, Birmingham, West Midlands B43 5QF

Inspection dates

14–15 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	Good
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

- For a period after the previous inspection, the school's effectiveness, the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements were in rapid decline.
- In some lessons, teachers do not provide enough work that extends pupils' learning to help them reach higher standards in reading and writing. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils. Nor are tasks always sufficiently adapted to meet pupils' needs or address their misunderstandings.
- In key stage 1, the teaching does not always build on the good start made in the early years. In key stage 2, some teachers do not use assessments well enough to plan tasks that meet pupils' abilities. Learning support staff do not always intervene well enough to help pupils.
- Standards are improving but pupils are still capable of doing better in key stage 2. Some pupils make unnecessary and repeated spelling and punctuation errors when writing. In key stage 1, pupils' handwriting is not improving well enough.
- Leaders still have a lot to do to sustain improvements to teaching and learning. Improvements are stalling at times because their evaluations of the quality of teaching are not always accurate enough.
- Although detailed improvement plans have been drawn up, leaders do not focus enough on those priorities that will address the weaknesses in teaching.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders are reversing the historic decline in pupils' achievement. They are bringing back much-welcome stability to the school.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including those in the specially resourced provision, achieve well.
- Pupils behave well and there are warm and positive relationships between them and staff.
- Mathematics teaching is improving well. Increasingly, more pupils make good progress.
- Leaders provide a rich programme of curriculum activities and enrichment. These have a positive effect on pupils' personal development and attitudes to learning.
- Children in the early years get off to a good start. Teaching in the Nursery and Reception classes is well managed and effective.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Maintain the current improvements to teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - making sure that teachers plan the right challenges and work in lessons, particularly for most-able pupils
 - making sure that, in all classes, teachers and support staff adapt tasks and question pupils more effectively to address any misunderstandings and extend learning
 - improving the way learning support staff intervene to help pupils, especially when pupils work independently, so that they help to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding
 - using assessment information better to build on what pupils already know so that they all reach their expected attainment targets.
- Sustain the improvements to pupils' achievement in reading and writing by:
 - making sure that the most able pupils are provided with the right level of challenge in lessons to help them reach higher standards and learn in greater depth
 - building on the best practice in Years 5 and 6 to provide more opportunities for pupils to write at length independently
 - adopting consistent and effective ways to teach handwriting, spelling and punctuation.
- Sustain improvements to senior and middle leadership by:
 - making sure leaders focus on those priorities in the school's action plans that will have most impact on improving teaching and learning
 - making sure that evaluations of teachers' performance and their impact on pupils' achievements are accurate enough to help identify what needs to improve.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The many staff and leadership changes during the two years following the previous inspection led to a significant decline in the school's effectiveness. National assessments of pupils' achievements from 2014 to 2016 show that standards declined significantly. Staffing instability and inconsistent leadership during these two years hindered school improvement.
- Since September 2016, the headteacher, deputy headteacher, four assistant headteachers and governors have had to deal with significant staff turnover and weak or inadequate teaching.
- In the first two years following the school's previous inspection, the local authority did not do enough to intervene when standards slipped. Since the headteacher joined in April 2016, she ensured that the local authority put in place more support and intervention. A local authority school improvement adviser and other external consultants are now playing a vital and more effective role in helping leaders maintain the current pace of improvement.
- The restructuring of roles and changes being implemented by the headteacher and senior staff are working. Leaders have the capacity to sustain improvements. Inspection evidence confirms that, after a period of decline, standards are rising and teaching is improving.
- Improved assessment systems have been developed by the headteacher and deputy headteacher to help leaders track pupils' progress and performance more effectively. Assessments are now more accurate and are helping to identify those groups of pupils most in need of support. For example, improved teaching and focused intervention work are helping disadvantaged pupils who were previously underachieving to catch up on lost ground.
- Most of the parents and carers who spoke with inspectors and the large majority who responded to Parent View are pleased with their children's education. 'I have never come across a school that values both children's education and their care to such a degree', stated one. This comment reflected the range of similarly positive views from most parents. However, a significant minority of parents raised concerns about the school's decline following its previous inspection.
- To sustain improvement, the headteacher and governors identify the right priorities in their strategic action plans. Senior and middle leaders monitor lessons, pupils' work and assessment information regularly. This systematic approach is helping to improve pupils' progress and teachers' performance. However, evaluations of teaching are not always accurate enough to help some teachers and learning support staff to focus on aspects of their practice that need to improve most.
- Strategic improvement planning helps to guide leaders' and governors' actions and monitoring activities. The headteacher and senior leaders recognised when joining the school that there was a great deal to do to address many serious shortcomings in teaching and learning. However, there are too many priorities set out in the improvement plan, making it difficult for leaders and governors to focus on those that

will have the most impact on improving teaching and learning.

- The pupil premium is being used well to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils. As a result and increasingly, more disadvantaged pupils achieve well and are catching up after falling behind. Similarly, funding for pupils with SEND is being used well to plan interventions and deploy resources to most effect for pupils who have additional learning needs, disabilities or specific learning difficulties, such as autism.
- Staff training and professional development are well planned. Nearly all the staff reported in the staff survey that they feel well supported by senior and middle leaders. Newly qualified teachers are benefiting from well-devised training and support. Assistant headteachers are good role models and share their experiences with staff to help improvement. There is scope now to build on this by ensuring that evaluations of teaching are more about their impact on pupils' learning and progress over time rather than teachers' plans, intentions or performance.
- The planned curriculum is improving and includes a good range of enrichment, such as outdoor learning, educational visits, sport and the creative and performing arts. These make a significant contribution to pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning and school.
- Sport, physical education and music are strong features of the school's curriculum. Many pupils benefit from the range of sports, team games and activities provided by the school. Effective use is made of the primary physical education and sports grant. Currently, the school is investing a great deal of effort and charitable funding to improve outdoor sports facilities. The creative and performing arts, particularly music, are also taught well, resulting in the school achieving national recognition for its music provision. Leaders and staff promote a core set of values for pupils to aspire towards. These values are integral to the British way of life so that pupils learn to respect and understand all major faiths, beliefs and cultures. The staff plan activities, including educational visits and the use of visitors or special themes, to support pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Governance of the school

- The governing body, like senior leaders, has had to deal with many staff and leadership changes since the previous inspection. Governors are committed to ensuring that the school continues its current recovery. Following the obvious decline in the school's performance after the previous inspection, governors are now more diligent in exercising their duties to oversee and manage the school's work.
 - Governors have carried out external reviews, including reviews of pupil premium spending, to make sure that leaders have the necessary resources to implement effective interventions and support for pupils.
 - Regular feedback is provided by leaders to inform governors. There are good structures in place to ensure that governors are linked to key aspects of the school's work.
 - Governors challenge senior leaders and hold the headteacher to account for pupils' progress and teachers' performance. There is scope to improve the accuracy of feedback provided by senior leaders about the quality of teaching in some parts of

the school, so that governors have a clear picture of where improvement is still needed.

- Improved assessment systems are increasingly being used by senior leaders to provide governors with more accurate information about the progress of different groups of pupils.
- There are effective arrangements in place to help governors see at first hand how well pupils are doing when they visit classes with leaders.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There is a vigilant culture of safeguarding to ensure that pupils are safe, protected, healthy and happy in school.
- Safeguarding procedures, policies and training are up to date. Systematic audits and reviews are carried out to ensure consistency of practice and effectiveness.
- The staff have been trained to keep children safe and are aware of the school's arrangements for reporting concerns. Staff have undertaken first-aid training, including paediatric first aid for early years children. Leaders, staff and governors are vigilant in protecting children from radicalisation, extremism and child exploitation.
- Pupils are taught about online safety and how to manage risks. This is good practice, particularly for older pupils before they transfer to secondary education.
- Most parents inspectors spoke to were unanimous in their belief that pupils are safe in school. Pupils say that the staff and other pupils make them feel very safe, valued and secure. Vulnerable pupils and families are supported and treated with dignity and care.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement in parts of key stages 1 and 2 because it has not yet led to consistently good achievement for all pupils. The work in pupils' books, assessments of their progress and observations of learning in lessons show that pupils are still capable of achieving more.
- However, inspection findings also confirm that teachers are increasingly adopting more consistent practice, which is having a positive impact on raising standards and improving pupils' achievement. Most of the responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and most of the parents spoken to during the inspection are pleased with the improvements to teaching.
- Despite the improved assessment information that teachers have, too often teachers are not using assessments of pupils' progress to plan and adapt tasks to meet all pupils' needs and abilities. The most able pupils in particular are not being provided with enough challenging work in some lessons.
- Some teachers are missing opportunities to improve pupils' reading and writing skills. The questions teachers pose when pupils read or write independently do not extend pupils' thinking or vocabulary. However, there are some positive exceptions to this in some classes. For example, in a Year 6 English lesson, the teacher provided ample opportunities for pupils to broaden their vocabulary when writing about the key

features of animals.

- In some lessons, teachers do not expect pupils to go over mistakes or errors while these are fresh in pupils' minds. In the most effective lessons, teachers probe and question pupils to make sure they understand the next steps in their learning. This good level of questioning is not yet common practice, resulting in some pupils making slower progress. Handwriting practice is a feature of the start of many English lessons. However, the most capable writers are still spending too much time practising their handwriting, rather than getting on with more independent and extended writing that is sufficiently challenging for them.
- Pupils are usually well behaved and attentive in lessons. They are eager to contribute to class and group discussions. These positive attributes of learning reflect consistent expectations for behaviour by staff. However, when pupils work independently, too often teachers and support staff do not extend learning or help pupils learn from their mistakes. This is particularly evident in some books, which show that pupils make repeated spelling errors. In addition, when supervising pupils' work, learning support assistants do not always intervene effectively when pupils struggle with the work they are set.
- Pupils' work and progress show that the teaching of mathematics over time is more consistently effective than the teaching of reading and writing. The best and most consistent practice is evident in parts of Year 2 and in Years 5 and 6. In these lessons, pupils' work shows that teachers adapt the tasks they planned to deepen pupils' understanding so that, increasingly, more pupils learn mathematics in greater depth. This is not universally the case, however, as pupils are sometimes repeating work they already know and understand before moving on to mastering higher levels of understanding.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- 'I really like my teachers. They really help and care for me' and 'Teachers are kind and always help you' were just some of the numerous positive comments made by pupils to inspectors. There are positive and supportive relationships between pupils and staff.
- The specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND is particularly successful in helping pupils who have specific learning difficulties to integrate with other pupils at breaktimes and during lessons. This is helping all pupils to live and work together, regardless of their abilities or vulnerabilities.
- There is a good sense of communal responsibility and collective endeavour so that pupils have opportunities to participate and contribute to their school community. This is having a positive impact on their personal, social and moral development. Pupils have good opportunities to influence the work of the school. For example, as playground pals, reading buddies, school councillors and librarians, they contribute to their school community. Inspectors observed, on many occasions, pupils playing cooperatively at breaktimes and caring for others, including looking after vulnerable

pupils or those with a disability.

- Pupils are systematically taught how to deal with bullying, internet safety and the risks of radicalisation or exploitation. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and know how to share any concerns they may have with leaders and staff.
- Many parents commented to inspectors that their children settle into school well because the headteacher, staff and other pupils are caring and respectful of everyone. Another parent, reflecting most of the views expressed by parents who have children with SEND, confirmed how responsive staff and leaders are to their children's needs. Inspectors agree and found that leaders and staff are committed to pupils' personal development and well-being.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils dress smartly in their uniforms and are proud of their school. Those with specific responsibilities wear their school badge with honour. Pupils are keen to show visitors their work displayed around the school and appreciate the way staff value their efforts by rewarding good behaviour and effort when working in lessons.
- The 'dojo' reward and 'yellow card' sanction systems work very well, and pupils understand what acceptable or unacceptable behaviour is. Pupils cooperate well in lessons and at other times. They are kind and helpful to each other and willingly offer praise to other pupils, including those with SEND. These positive characteristics make a good contribution to pupils' moral and social development.
- Pupils listen and respond enthusiastically during class discussions. For example, during a writing lesson, pupils in Year 5 were very keen to share and generate ideas about persuasive writing. Pupils supported each other very well, encouraged the sharing of ideas and listened to each other with respect and courtesy. As a result, even the most reluctant pupil was encouraged to contribute.
- There are occasions, however, when pupils are not being challenged enough. As a result, they lose concentration, which affects their learning. In some lessons, the most able pupils are made to wait too long before going on to an extension task. Although this means they are not fully engaged, they do not usually disturb others while they wait for harder work.
- Pupils enjoy school, and this was clearly reflected in their keen and smiling faces as they come through the school gates each morning with their parents and families. Attendance rates compare well with national figures and pupils are usually punctual and ready for school and learning. Any pupils who arrive slightly late are checked in by administrative or support staff with sensitivity and encouragement. There is little persistent absenteeism.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The standards pupils reach in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stages 1 and 2 represent variable progress in relation to their starting points. Pupils should be doing better in reading and writing. They make good progress in

mathematics in most classes. However, there is still scope for pupils to reach even higher standards in reading and writing across the school.

- National assessments at key stage 1 in 2017 show that standards were too low in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the results represented an improvement in reading and mathematics compared with the poor results in 2016. Pupils' writing still needs improvement, especially handwriting and spelling.
- The most recent assessments indicate further improvement at key stage 1, as most pupils reached age-related standards in reading, writing and mathematics. In addition, the proportion of pupils exceeding age-related standards improved markedly. However, teaching does not build enough on the good start made in the early years. This is reflected in some pupils falling short of the expected standard in phonics in Year 1. The most recent phonics assessments in 2018, although unvalidated, show improvement compared with national figures.
- At key stage 2, a similar picture emerges. From poor results in 2016, the standards most pupils reached by the end of Year 6 in 2018 improved, although there is still potential for this to improve further, particularly in reading and writing. In mathematics, assessment results in 2018, again unvalidated, show that pupils in Year 6 achieved well.
- Current assessments across the school show that standards are improving but the progress pupils make is variable and depends on the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 are making good progress, reflecting more consistently good teaching in most classes in these year groups.
- Pupils with SEND make good progress. They receive carefully tailored and timely support. The effective management of SEND provision enables teachers and support staff to plan the right interventions. Pupils in the specially resourced provision do well. They receive effective one-to-one support, as well as good opportunities to integrate and socialise with other pupils in mainstream classes.
- The progress made by disadvantaged pupils is similar to that made by other pupils nationally. In some year groups, these pupils are catching up on considerable lost ground. As a result, the difference between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils is closing. The pace of improvement varies according to the consistency and quality of teaching. The small number of pupils who are in the early stages of speaking English as an additional language generally make good progress. They settle into school quickly and are helped to improve their confidence and fluency in spoken and written English.
- As standards improve, pupils in Year 6 are catching up on lost ground in preparation for moving to secondary education. This was not always the case in the recent past when standards by the end of key stage 2 were too low. Currently, pupils in Years 5 and 6 are increasingly acquiring secure core literacy and mathematics skills that will enable them to cope with the key stage 3 curriculum. However, there is still scope to improve the achievement of pupils in all year groups across the school, including that of the most able pupils, so that more learn in greater depth and reach the highest standards.

Early years provision

Good

- Most children join the Nursery or Reception class with skills and abilities that are typical for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy. This has varied in the past as some children joined the school with low skills and abilities. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year is increasing.
- Children's work and progress show that early years provision is making a good contribution to their all-round development. There is good teaching and leadership in the early years. Staff are vigilant, caring and effective in making sure that the children play and learn together safely and productively.
- Good teaching, combined with strong pastoral support for both children and families in the Nursery and Reception Years are getting the youngest children off to a good start. Staff have built good working relationships with children and their families. All staff have a well-developed knowledge of the early years assessment requirements.
- The youngest children have settled very well into the routines of the Nursery. Adults know and look after their children well and set them tasks that are usually interesting, varied and stimulating. Boys and girls were observed by an inspector caring for baby dolls as part of a very effective nurture session. This was highly effective and helped the children to improve their social and emotional development.
- Activities in both the Nursery and Reception classes are linked to children's own experiences, such as role play shopping, cooking or going to the outdoor garden to plant seeds and bulbs. In both settings, calm and effective reading sessions, involving adults sharing books and reading aloud with small groups, are well planned to provide children with good-quality stories and interesting books to share with their friends.
- There are good systems in place for staff to check on the progress made by children. Assessments are accurate so that teachers and support staff have a firm basis for planning children's learning. The children's learning journeys are catalogued individually for each child and are well presented.
- Children, whatever their starting points or backgrounds, make good progress in early reading and writing. Teachers and support staff are good at linking the teaching of early reading with that of early writing. Although staff insist that children form letters correctly when they teach the sounds that letters make, this good practice is not built upon when the children move from Reception into Year 1. Leaders are aware of this and have started to focus on introducing a consistent approach to the teaching of handwriting.
- There is a strong emphasis on speaking and listening which provides good foundations for children's development of early language and literacy. However, there are occasions when adults expect the Reception children to wait their turn for too long or to engage in independent activities that are either too easy or too hard. This slows the pace of learning.
- All welfare requirements, including assessments and the provision made for three-year-olds, are met. Staff are well qualified and have the necessary experience and expertise to deliver effective teaching and sustain improved outcomes for children.

School details

Unique reference number	103982
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	10047497

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	609
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Sparkes
Headteacher	Ruth Gillett
Telephone number	01213 573 326
Website	www.ferndaleprimary.co.uk/
Email address	headteacher@ferndale.sandwell.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12–13 March 2014

Information about this school

- This school is much larger than most primary schools. Pupils come from a range of backgrounds. Although one in four pupils speak English as an additional language, only a small number are in the early stages of learning English.
- Early years provision comprises a Nursery class for up to 78 three- and four-year-old children, and three Reception classes for four- and five-year-olds. The children in the Nursery attend part time or full time.
- The school has specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND. This provides for up to 10 pupils who have education, health and care plans and who are autistic or have complex communication needs. Across the school, the percentage of pupils with SEND is above that of most schools.
- Since the previous inspection in March 2014, there have been considerable staff changes. The headteacher joined the school in April 2016 and some other senior leaders joined in September 2016. Leaders and governors have commissioned additional support from external consultants, including one of the local authority's school improvement advisers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited parts of lessons in every year group. Many visits were made jointly with the headteacher, deputy headteacher or assistant headteachers. Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work in books, assessment information and records of previous work, including work displayed on walls in classrooms and corridors.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation including: leaders' evaluations of the school's effectiveness; the school's improvement and strategic plans; assessment information and tracking data about pupils' achievement, progress and performance; and some school documents and data relating to governance, teaching, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils during lessons. They met with three groups of pupils to hear them read and to discuss their work, behaviour and safety. Inspectors spoke to pupils during break and lunchtimes to ask them for their views about the school.
- Inspectors spoke to several parents to seek their views about the school and analysed the 126 responses to Parent View, as well as the 121 free-text comments. The lead inspector considered the 33 responses from staff and the five responses from pupils in Years 5 and 6 to Ofsted's online surveys. Inspectors also talked to the staff team during the inspection to gauge their views about the support they receive.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteachers. The lead inspector held a meeting with five governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. A meeting was held with a school improvement adviser from Sandwell local authority. The lead inspector also spoke with the school's business manager to check safeguarding and staff vetting records.

Inspection team

Charalambos Loizou, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Clair McNeill	Ofsted Inspector
Gill Turner	Ofsted Inspector
Amarjit Cheema	Ofsted Inspector

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