

Prae Wood Primary School

King Harry Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 4HZ

Inspection dates

3–4 July 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher provides exceptional leadership. Her unwavering commitment has ensured that there is a strong and effective collaborative culture.
- Together, leaders have created a highly inclusive and nurturing culture where pupils thrive, especially in their personal, social and emotional development.
- Governors have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths. They provide strong challenge by holding school leaders to account for the school's performance.
- Leaders have established a rich and varied curriculum. Pupils become experts in different subjects, helping them to develop a range of skills.
- Teaching is effective throughout the school. However, some teachers are not as adept at challenging pupils' learning by moving them on in a timely manner.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are extremely well mannered and sensitive to the needs of others. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.
- Teachers plan interesting activities that engage pupils in their learning, enabling them to make good or better progress.
- Effective teaching of phonics provides a good platform for pupils' reading. Over time, pupils make strong progress by developing a love of reading.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are making good progress as a result of the targeted support they receive.
- Children in the early years make a flying start to their education. They excel in the precisely planned provision.
- Parents are highly supportive of the school's leadership and the care shown to pupils by all the staff.
- Pupils are now making stronger progress in mathematics. However, some teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their mastery of mathematics through using reasoning skills.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen teaching and improve pupils' progress by ensuring that:
 - the strongest practice is shared to support teachers to develop their skills further
 - teachers challenge pupils swiftly in their learning so that more achieve the higher standards.
- Build on the improvements that have been made in mathematics by ensuring that all pupils secure their mathematical understanding through using their reasoning skills.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher is resolute in her determination that the quality of education should be the best it can be. Together, senior leaders have set high expectations for staff and pupils which have contributed significantly to the improvement of the school. The progress of current pupils is now improving quickly in all year groups.
- Leaders have responded well to the rapid expansion of the school. They have built upon the school's previous successes by ensuring that staff are well equipped with the skills to meet the needs of pupils who have recently arrived. The school has retained its strong sense of community. The highly inclusive and nurturing environment ensures that pupils flourish in their social and emotional development. A comment made on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, was typical of others in stating: 'Prae Wood is a wonderful nurturing school that fosters a strong sense of community in its children.'
- Leaders are accurate in their self-evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Improvement planning is effective and focuses on the right things.
- Middle leaders understand their roles well. They work closely with senior leaders so that they have a positive impact on improving all aspects of the school. Leaders use their expertise effectively to support the professional development of teachers through coaching and support. This has made a significant contribution to strengthening teaching across the school.
- Staff appreciate the support they have been given and the positive working atmosphere leaders have created. As one member of staff commented in the staff survey: 'There is an ethos where we are thanked and feel valued for the job we do every day.' Consequently, morale is high.
- At the heart of the curriculum is pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Topics are expertly designed. They provide pupils with knowledge and skills from a range of different subjects. Topics apply learning to a meaningful context, ensuring that pupils have a deep understanding of what they have learned. For example, pupils learned about the rainforest to become eco-ambassadors. In another project, pupils learned about the local community and the impact of pollution on the environment. They used this information to write persuasive letters about pollution's harmful effects.
- Pupils' experiences are enriched through the many extra-curricular opportunities offered by the school, such as in sports, creative arts, technology and foreign languages. Pupils told inspectors about trips and visits which occur frequently throughout the year. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils understand about similarities and differences. Through assemblies and the wider curriculum, they gain a good understanding of the different faiths and cultures which are increasingly reflected in the growing school community.
- Leaders make very effective use of the relatively small amount of funding for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders are careful to ensure that the barriers to pupils' learning are tackled, whether that means supporting pupils socially or academically. As a result

of the well-tailored support, the current progress of disadvantaged pupils is ensuring that differences are diminishing rapidly.

- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is experienced and very knowledgeable. Leaders have a detailed understanding of each pupil's needs. They regularly check the plans they have developed, and provide support for staff so that pupils successfully achieve their targets. Consequently, pupils with SEND make good progress from their starting points.
- Leaders make effective use of the sport premium to ensure that pupils are developing healthy lifestyles and participating in a variety of sports and activities. For example, the daily mile is a regular feature of pupils' activity.
- Parents are delighted with the school and the efforts of leaders. They are highly positive about the welcoming ethos and strong pastoral support that help to provide their children with a well-rounded education. All parents who spoke to inspectors at the start and the end of the school day could not praise the school and its leaders highly enough. One comment from Parent View that sums up the views of many said: 'My children are happy and excited to go to school each morning. I think this is a brilliant school and recommend it very highly.'

Governance of the school

- Governors are astute and use their knowledge of the school to provide challenge and support for school leaders. They receive regular information from senior and middle leaders about different aspects of the school's work. The records of their meetings show that governors ask probing questions about the performance of the school.
- Governors are clear about their roles and responsibilities. They are committed and share the high ambitions of leaders for the school's future. Governors ensure that they are known to the staff, and that they are seen as part of the school community. All governors are linked to members of the teaching team. This helps to build strong relationships, and enables governors to check on what leaders say is happening in the school.
- Governors have a detailed understanding of how leaders spend additional funding to ensure that it supports the good progress of disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with SEND.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders give a high priority to safeguarding throughout the school. Leaders ensure that staff receive regular training so that they are knowledgeable about their roles. Staff are vigilant for any signs that pupils may be at risk of harm, and understand how they would report their concerns. The systems for recording concerns are efficient so that safeguarding leaders act swiftly in making any referrals. The recording systems allow leaders to check for any wider concerns so that they can build a full picture of any issues regarding pupils' welfare. Leaders have established effective working relationships with external agencies to ensure that help is available for any vulnerable pupils and their families.

- Records for the employment and use of adults who work with children are well maintained and organised. Leaders, including governors, make regular checks of the information so that it is accurate and up to date.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is good across the school and some is particularly effective. Teachers typically have good subject knowledge. They use this well to question and probe pupils' responses during whole-class sessions. Where teaching is most effective, clear explanations ensure that pupils' misconceptions are addressed. For example, in a Year 4 lesson, the teacher skilfully questioned pupils so that they had a good understanding of persuasive writing before writing a manifesto.
- Relationships between pupils and adults are excellent. Pupils confidently discuss their ideas while their classmates listen intently to what each of their peers has to say. Consequently, classrooms provide a secure and safe place to discuss complex and sensitive issues. For example, pupils in Year 6 shared their own thoughts about what they believed, while their peers thoughtfully reflected on their views.
- Teachers plan activities that interest and engage pupils in their learning. At the start of every topic, teachers take account of what pupils know already and what they would like to find out. This ensures that pupils are well motivated, because the tasks they complete are purposeful.
- The teaching of phonics is effective. Pupils apply their phonics knowledge well to help them become enthusiastic and avid readers. Older pupils enjoy reading for pleasure. Teachers ensure that pupils have opportunities to read high-quality texts through their independent choices or by sharing a whole-class book.
- Writing is given a high priority across the school. Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to write for a range of purposes and in different forms. Work in pupils' books shows that they apply their skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar consistently in all types of writing. Pupils are encouraged to edit and refine their work in response to teachers' feedback. While pupils present their work neatly, the use of a cursive handwriting style is not consistent in all year groups, especially for older pupils.
- Mathematics is taught effectively. Pupils develop their fluency well through regular practise of number facts. Teachers make careful checks on pupils' prior knowledge through activities that require quick recall of their understanding. However, not all teachers ensure that pupils develop a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts by making regular use of their reasoning skills.
- Teachers use their assessment of pupils' learning accurately. This ensures that work is pitched at the right level for each pupil. Some teachers use their knowledge skilfully to quickly identify when to move pupils on to more challenging tasks. However, at times, some teachers do not recognise where pupils require a timely challenge. Consequently, these pupils do not think deeply enough about their learning to enable them to achieve higher standards.
- Teaching assistants and teachers work well together. They use their questioning skills effectively to help pupils understand and have access to new learning. Adults are highly effective in providing extra support for those pupils who have complex needs.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Highly effective relationships between pupils and their peers, as well as between pupils and adults, promote strong levels of trust and confidence. All pupils look after each other, as demonstrated through their friendships and collaborative skills. Pupils share games and activities at lunchtimes, regardless of their age. Older pupils are proud of being given opportunities to guide and support younger pupils. For example, Year 6 pupils led mixed-age groups in discussions about any concerns pupils may have when they move to new classes. They handled the conversations with sensitivity and insight to reassure the younger pupils.
- Pupils' voice is encouraged; this helps them to develop a good understanding of life in modern Britain. Ideas of democracy, tolerance and respect are promoted through different roles and responsibilities, such as school councillors, members of a student association, eco-warriors and sport ambassadors. Pupils are acutely aware of how they can make a difference to their life at school. Their engagement in debates and decision-making processes makes a strong contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- All staff share the high expectations and strong commitment to supporting pupils' well-being. The pastoral care in the school is very strong. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and have great confidence that adults would resolve any of their concerns. This ensures that the school is a harmonious and secure community.
- Parents are highly positive about the inclusive and caring nature of the school. For example, one parent explained: 'I'm happy that Prae Wood is helping to give our children a very good foundation for learning while supporting their emotional well-being.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning and eager to do well. They listen attentively to their teachers and waste no time in getting on with their work. Pupils take pride in their achievements and how they present their work.
- Pupils are exceptionally friendly and polite. They talk confidently to visitors and maturely express their views and opinions on the school.
- Incidents of poor behaviour are rare. Pupils told inspectors that bullying did not happen at their school, but if it did they would tell adults immediately. Pupils understand the different forms bullying can take. They are taught about how to protect themselves when they use the internet or different forms of social media.
- Attendance is consistently above the national average and very few pupils miss a day from school. This indicates that they enjoy school and do not wish to miss any of their learning. Parents who spoke to inspectors commented on how their children loved their school and were very happy. One parent represented the view of many others on

Parent View when saying: 'My children are happy and excited to go to school each morning. I think this is a brilliant school and recommend it very highly.'

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Over time, pupils have made at least good progress in all subjects by the end of key stage 2. Their progress has been particularly strong in reading. Pupils' attainment has been consistently above average in all subjects at the expected standards for the last two years.
- In key stage 1, the proportions of pupils reaching the expected standards in reading writing and mathematics dipped in 2018. This is in part explained by a significant rise in the number of pupils who joined the school at later starting times, as the size of the school increased.
- Current pupils in key stages 1 and 2 continue to make strong progress in reading. Leaders' decisive actions have also ensured that pupils are now making better progress in writing. Progress in mathematics is not yet consistently as strong. This is because the school's strategies for using reasoning skills are not established in all year groups.
- Pupils with SEND make good progress. They receive effective support because teachers and teaching assistants have a good understanding of how to meet pupils' needs. Those pupils with complex needs make good progress towards their own personalised targets.
- Leaders are making effective use of the pupil premium funding to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Staff identify the barriers to learning accurately and use challenging targets to ensure that pupils are quickly catching up their peers.
- The curriculum provides pupils with a good range of learning opportunities across different subjects. Pupils develop a good knowledge of topics in history and geography because they are able to apply their understanding to well-planned activities.
- Some pupils across the school do not achieve the higher standards in their learning. This is because not all teachers ensure that pupils are consistently challenged to think harder about their learning.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Children join the early years with levels of development that are broadly typical for their age. Children make excellent progress so that by the time they leave the Reception class, an above-average proportion have achieved a good level of development and an increasing proportion are exceeding that level.
- The environment is highly engaging because it is meticulously planned and well resourced. Children's curiosity is developed through enticing activities. They show enthusiasm and perseverance when faced with a challenge. For example, children were engrossed in making axes and swords from boxes and tubes. They persisted in trying to find different ways to attach the materials. Working independently, they did not stop until they had been successful.
- Teachers have a secure understanding of children's development. They are highly effective in providing activities that promote children's development through linking

different aspects of their learning. For example, from the topic about people who help us, teachers planned activities related to the dentist that developed children's understanding of the world and keeping healthy, and enabled them to use fine motor skills when brushing models of teeth.

- Adults have established clear, effective routines which ensure that children settle quickly and feel secure within the early years setting. Children behave exceptionally well. They play together amicably, and willingly share ideas and help one another.
- Staff question children skilfully. They make use of children's independent learning to develop their interests and challenge their thinking. Leaders' prompts around the environment provide key questions that adults can use to deepen children's understanding as they play.
- Teachers ensure that they promote children's speech and language skills strongly. A well-structured approach to teaching phonics ensures that children develop the skills to support early reading. Books are integral to the planned activities. Well-resourced areas provide opportunities for children to read quietly and independently. Adults model spoken language and encourage children to respond by using ambitious vocabulary. This makes a strong contribution to children's communication skills.
- Evidence in children's learning journals shows that they make excellent progress in developing early writing and mathematical skills. These records detail children's achievements and support accurate assessments of children's progress and next steps.
- Leaders have established a strong partnership between school and home. Parents are asked to share children's learning at home by completing 'what you did that amazed me' postcards. Regular opportunities to visit the early years setting are encouraged so that parents are kept well informed of their child's development.
- Leaders ensure that children are kept safe through thorough risk assessments. Safeguarding is effective, and the provision meets statutory welfare requirements.

School details

Unique reference number	117315
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10087411

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

Type of school	All-through primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	419
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Guess
Headteacher	Jenny Sheppard
Telephone number	01727 751 930
Website	www.praewood.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@praewood.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	3 October 2018

Information about this school

- This primary school is a larger than an average-sized primary school.
- The new headteacher was appointed in September 2018.
- In recent years, the school has been expanded so that it has doubled in size. A significant number of pupils joined the school at times that were different from the normal admission times.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is below the national average.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school is responsible for managing a breakfast and after-school club on the school site.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons; some of these observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils about their learning and their views on the school. They also spoke to pupils informally while in lessons. Inspectors observed pupils at lunchtimes and as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors observed a meeting of the Prae Wood Students Association, where they discussed their opinions on the school.
- A wide range of documents were scrutinised, including information relating to governance, attendance, behaviour, safeguarding, pupils' progress and the checks made on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and subject leaders. Inspectors also met with two newly qualified teachers. Inspectors had meetings with six governors, including the chair of governors, as well as the school's improvement partner.
- Inspectors spoke with parents at the start and the end of the school day. They took account of parents' views by considering the 194 responses to Parent View, including 112 free-text comments.
- Inspectors considered the views of 49 staff who completed Ofsted's staff online survey, and the 28 responses from pupils to their inspection survey.

Inspection team

Steve Mellors, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Simon Harbrow	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Eardley	Ofsted Inspector

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