

Bluebell Meadow Primary School

Salters Lane, Trimdon Grange, Trimdon Station, County Durham TS29 6EY

Inspection dates

23–24 May 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Over time, leaders and governors have failed to address weaknesses in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Consequently, pupils in each key stage make insufficient progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Considerable instability in staffing, including at leadership level, has had a negative effect on pupils' learning and the pace of improvement.
- Subject leadership is poorly developed. Challenge, expectation and support have been lacking. Current leaders, including those for English and mathematics, are new to post. They are learning the craft of leadership with support from local authority partners.
- Systems of assessment have been ineffective. This has hampered leaders in identifying the correct priorities for improvement. Leaders' plans lack detail and measurability.
- Leaders have not embedded a clear, shared approach to the teaching of reading. In early years and key stage 1, pupils read infrequently. Too few staff are skilled in phonics teaching.
- Governors have not checked carefully to see if additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is being used to good effect.
- Teachers' expectations are too low and their subject knowledge is not consistently secure. They do not plan tasks that accurately meet the needs and interests of pupils. Time and additional adults are not used well to support and challenge pupils. Low-level disruption is too prevalent.
- Pupils are working well below the standards expected for their age in subjects across the curriculum, including spelling, grammar and punctuation. They do not take enough pride in the presentation of their work and are poorly prepared for the demands of the next year group or key stage.
- In early years, children make weak progress towards the early learning goals in reading, writing and number. Reception children's existing skills and knowledge are not built upon effectively. Learning, both indoors and outside, offers children too little challenge.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher offers a valuable, professional role model. She holds high aspirations for all pupils. Since taking up post, she has effected positive change despite facing significant financial constraints and turbulence in staffing.
- Leaders' actions are steadily improving pupils' health, well-being and behaviour.
- The deputy headteacher's work is making a positive difference for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and governance in order to significantly raise standards, by:
 - equipping teachers with the subject knowledge, skills and confidence needed to plan effectively for pupils and raising their expectations of what pupils can do and achieve
 - securing consistently high-quality teaching and learning across subjects so that all pupils are well prepared for the curriculum demands of the next year group
 - embedding an accurate system of assessment in reading, writing and mathematics
 - putting in place a shared, effective approach to the teaching of reading, making sure all staff have a deep knowledge of phonics and its central role in the development of pupils' reading, writing and spelling
 - developing expertise in subject leadership so that staff are successfully supported and challenged to improve pupils' knowledge across the curriculum
 - sharpening improvement plans, ensuring that they have clear timelines, are measurable and are fully focused upon improving teaching and learning
 - meticulously checking the use and effectiveness of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils
 - ensuring that all staff understand the dangers and risks associated with county lines.
- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching and learning in key stages 1 and 2, by:
 - using precise assessment information to plan tasks and learning that closely match pupils' needs and interests, across subjects, including reading, writing and mathematics
 - ensuring that all pupils have regular opportunities to read with adults in school, particularly in key stage 1
 - building expert knowledge and understanding of the role of phonics in reading, writing and spelling, among all teaching staff
 - systematically tackling weaknesses in pupils' spelling, grammar and punctuation
 - offering greater opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical reasoning to increasingly sophisticated problems as they move through school
 - maximising the use of additional adults and every available teaching and learning moment, to the benefit of pupils

- instilling pride among pupils in the presentation and quality of their work
- eradicating low-level disruption.
- Swiftly increase the effectiveness of the early years by:
 - using accurate assessment information to plan tasks and learning opportunities that closely match children’s needs
 - building more rapidly and effectively on children’s prior knowledge and existing skills in reading, writing and number
 - designing stimulating learning tasks, across all areas of learning, that offer greater challenge for children, both indoors and outside
 - equipping all staff with the heightened skills, knowledge and understanding to teach early reading and phonics well
 - making sure that all children read regularly with staff right from the start of their learning journey
 - using all available learning time more productively.

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

An external review of the school’s use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Since the previous inspection, the school has amalgamated with two other providers to become one. It now occupies two sites which are approximately two miles apart. There have been significant changes and turbulence in staffing due both to this process and to prolonged staff absence. A substantial financial burden has further obstructed development. Leadership capacity has been weakened considerably.
- Over time, leaders and governors have been unsuccessful in addressing weaknesses in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Their actions have failed to secure much-needed improvement. Consequently, current pupils in each key stage are making weak progress across the curriculum.
- Senior leaders have struggled to raise expectations among staff of what pupils can do and achieve. Adults' aspirations for pupils across both sites remain too low. This means too many pupils, including those who are eligible for additional pupil premium funding, are working well below the standards expected for their age and stage of development in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Leaders' systems of assessment have been ineffective over time. Until very recently, information about pupils' progress and attainment has been vague or incorrect. As a result, leaders have been hampered in their attempts to pinpoint the correct areas for improvement and teachers' planning for pupils has been ill-informed. Improvement plans across subjects lack the detail needed to effect positive change.
- Subject leadership is poorly developed. Most leaders, including those for English and mathematics, are new to their posts and are still getting to grips with the demands of their role. The local authority has brokered additional support for the school. External advisers are working intensively with subject leaders to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to execute their responsibilities successfully. This is beginning to make a positive difference as practices are starting to sharpen. Improvement in this area of leadership, however, has been too slow.
- Senior leaders have not put in place a shared, effective approach to reading. Decisions, such as when, with whom and how frequently pupils should read have not been ironed out and agreed. Currently, in key stage 1 and the early years, in particular, pupils have too few opportunities to practise their reading and to discuss their book choices with adults in school. Weaknesses in reading hamper pupils' access to the wider curriculum.
- Leaders have not made sure that all staff are confident and competent in their understanding of phonics. Too often, therefore, adults fail to identify and act upon gaps in pupils' phonics knowledge skilfully or promptly. Pupils' reading, spelling and writing development suffer.
- Recently, leaders have quite rightly placed a greater emphasis on developing pupils' basic number skills. This is starting to secure better number fluency among pupils. Leaders have not, however, ensured that teachers build pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills systematically or effectively. By the end of key stage 2, too few pupils reach the expected or higher standards of learning in mathematics over time.
- The headteacher demonstrates high aspirations for pupils and a keen desire to secure

more rapid improvement. Since her appointment in January 2018, she has taken time to get to know each pupil by name and has significantly improved pupils' behaviour and attitudes. The school's financial burden has reduced substantially, due to her effective management in this area. Given the current constraints in leadership capacity, she is correctly drawing upon the support and advice of local authority partners and headteacher colleagues in order to raise standards. Her positive, 'can-do' approach offers staff a strong role model and most staff now share her vision for the future.

- The deputy headteacher's actions are having a positive effect on the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). She is working to heighten adults' expertise, skills and understanding in this area. As a result, the needs of pupils with SEND are being identified more swiftly and accurately. This means that pupils are increasingly likely to receive the support they need to make progress in keeping up with their peers from similar starting points.
- Senior leaders are ensuring that the primary sports premium funding is being used more purposefully. Pupils are benefiting. Greater understanding among pupils about the importance of good mental health, physical fitness and healthy eating is developing apace.
- Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Governance of the school

- Over time, governors have not offered enough challenge or support to leaders during a period of significant change. Consequently, the school's overall performance has declined and tensions in the local community arising from the amalgamation of the three schools have lingered.
- Governors cannot explain the effect of additional funding on disadvantaged pupils' progress. They have not checked to make sure that leaders are using this financial resource well to make a positive difference for pupils. Governors, therefore, have failed to notice or appreciate the declining outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics for this group of pupils over time.
- Most governors are new or recently appointed. Governors have embarked on a wide range of professional development and training opportunities to heighten their knowledge and understanding of their duties and responsibilities. Recently, more searching questions are being asked of leaders by governors. It is too soon to see, however, if this increased expertise will help secure better outcomes for pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The headteacher prioritises matters of child protection and safeguarding. Staff benefit from regular training and frequent updates. The weekly staff meeting agenda has safeguarding as a standing item. This allows staff the opportunity to share information appropriately and to discuss any concerns that they may have. Consequently, risks for pupils are minimised.
- Senior leaders have tightened procedures for recording, communicating and drawing

together any matters of concern. Logs and records are fit for purpose. Posters make clear to all staff and visitors to whom any concerns should be reported. An electronic system has been put in place to capture information about any incidents and issues that arise. Information is reviewed regularly by leaders. As a result of their actions, leaders can now identify any patterns and/or specific issues and take prompt action to address matters.

- Despite senior leaders' recent and regular updates, not all staff have a strong understanding of the terminology and risks associated with county lines. Leaders are currently putting additional training in place to ensure that all staff fully understand the potential implications for pupils and families who may be vulnerable.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- The quality of teaching and learning is weak. In each key stage, too many pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are working well below the standards expected for their age, across subjects, because they are making poor progress.
- Teachers do not plan tasks and learning that accurately match the needs of pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers' assessment practices, although improving, are weak and inaccurate. Expectations are too low. Insufficient account is taken of pupils' prior learning and existing knowledge. As a result, some pupils complete things they already know and can do while others struggle to access and manage their work. Pupils, therefore, become distracted and low-level disruption ensues.
- Teachers' practices in developing pupils as readers and writers vary considerably. Despite the recent introduction of some new reading initiatives, the opportunities that pupils have to read differ widely. Too many pupils in early years and key stage 1, in particular, read infrequently with adults in school. Not all teachers demonstrate an adequate understanding of phonics. Consequently, pupils' progress in reading, writing and spelling is hindered.
- In writing, a high proportion of pupils across year groups are working well below the standards expected for their age. Pupils' spelling, grammar and punctuation are especially weak. Too often pupils take insufficient pride in their work; their handwriting and presentation vary widely across subjects.
- Currently, most teachers make sure that pupils have plenty of time to practise basic number skills. This means that pupils are steadily becoming more fluent and confident in their basic number knowledge. However, pupils' abilities in reasoning mathematically and applying their logic to solve increasingly sophisticated problems remain weak.
- Teaching staff do not make the very best use of time in lessons. Not all available adults are directed effectively to make a positive contribution to pupils' learning. Too often, time is lost as resources, transitions and/or classrooms are poorly organised. These issues hamper the pace of learning and pupils' progress.
- Some pockets of stronger teaching and learning exist. In these instances, teachers use their questioning skills to get pupils to think more deeply about their learning. They explain new concepts succinctly and clearly, carefully demonstrating tricky strategies or methods of recording, to support pupils' understanding. This positive practice is not, however, shared widely or effectively.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Due to weaknesses in the quality of teaching, pupils have a poorly developed understanding of how to be a successful learner. Too often, they wait for and rely on additional direction from staff or get distracted and drift off-task, especially when tasks are ill-matched to their needs. Aspirations are too low and self-help skills are lacking.
- Pupils are confident that they have adults in school to talk with if they have any worries. However, a small proportion of parents and pupils who spoke with inspectors raised some concerns about occasions of bullying. While pupils feel staff tackle any issues that arise effectively, their knowledge and understanding of the different forms that bullying might take are limited. This thwarts pupils in their ability to recognise and respond appropriately to any incidents of bullying that may occur.
- Pupils, particularly those in key stage 2, can talk knowledgeably about the benefits and dangers of being online. Regular e-safety sessions and assemblies support pupils in keeping themselves safe online.
- Staff are respectful and kind. They are caring and patient and develop warm relationships with pupils. Consequently, adults and pupils get along well together and enjoy each other's company.
- Teachers respond firmly and appropriately to any incidents of derogatory language. They are suitably vigilant in terms of pupils' physical and emotional health and well-being. The personal, social and emotional needs of vulnerable pupils in particular are considered carefully. Aptly, staff draw on external expertise and agencies, such as occupational health, behaviour support and speech and language partners, to assist pupils, where required.
- Pupils value the headteacher and deputy headteacher enormously. Many went out of their way, during inspection, to offer positive opinions of both leaders. Pupils seek, and are offered, regular opportunities to share their views and opinions with these leaders. Mutual respect is evident.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Across key stages and sites, low-level disruption too frequently contributes to reduced learning. This is because of low expectations, persistent weaknesses in teachers' planning and inconsistencies in adults' application of the revised behaviour policy.
- Due to the headteacher's decisive actions, pupils' behaviour in and around school is improving. Procedures and practices have been reviewed and revised. For example, new systems for capturing and sharing information about behavioural incidents are helping leaders to identify and tackle any recurring or persistent issues. Currently, most

pupils show respect for one another and staff.

- Senior leaders' actions have been successful in raising pupils' overall attendance and punctuality. Currently, pupils' attendance is similar to the national average seen in 2018. Fewer pupils now arrive late. Nonetheless, the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent has risen recently. This means that for a small proportion of pupils, their learning and development are impeded.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Currently, pupils in each key stage are making weak progress in reading, writing and mathematics. A large proportion of pupils are working below or well below the standards expected for their age across the curriculum in each year group. Too few pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their learning.
- Pupils' progress and proficiency in reading are significantly hampered by weaknesses in teachers' assessment, and teaching. In each key stage, the proportion of pupils currently reading with the skills and knowledge expected for their age is low. As a result, pupils' development is hindered and their access to subjects across the curriculum is inhibited.
- Pupils' opportunities to read with staff vary considerably, especially in key stage 1 and the early years. This slows the pace of progress for too many pupils. Too few adults are skilled in their teaching of phonics. There is a lack of understanding of the crucial role of phonics in developing pupils' reading, writing and spelling knowledge and skills. Teachers do not reliably address pupils' misconceptions, gaps and/or specific barriers in reading and phonics as they move through year groups.
- Pupils' outcomes in phonics in Year 1 appear in keeping with national averages over time. Work in pupils' books, however, shows a different picture, suggesting that assessment information lacks accuracy. By the end of key stage 1, pupils' outcomes in reading and writing are declining year on year. In 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in both subjects at the end of Year 2 was lower than the national average. This year, fewer still are working at the standard expected for their age.
- In key stage 1, pupils' outcomes have steadily declined in reading, writing and mathematics over time. In 2018, the proportions of pupils reaching expected standards in mathematics and science were also lower than those seen nationally. Work in current pupils' books shows that this picture of weak progress is persisting.
- Key stage 2 pupils' progress over time is concerning. In 2018, pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics was significantly below averages and in the lowest 10% of schools nationally.
- In key stage 2, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standards in all subjects, including science, is very low. Pupils' poor attainment is due to weaknesses in teaching and adults' low expectations. In 2018, for example, less than a quarter of pupils in Year 6 reached the expected standard in mathematics and less than half of the girls met the expected standard in science. Very few pupils over time reach a greater depth of learning in any subject because challenge is lacking.
- Over time, disadvantaged pupils' progress in reading, writing or mathematics is well

below the national average. In 2018, no disadvantaged pupils reached the combined expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. This group are poorly prepared for the demands of the key stage 3 curriculum.

- Pupils with SEND are starting to make better progress. Pupils' specific needs are identified more promptly and the correct support from external partners such as health and social care is drawn upon. Staff are, for example, addressing pupils' personal, social and emotional needs effectively.

Early years provision

Inadequate

- Children's outcomes have declined over time. In 2018, fewer than half of the children reached a good level of development by the time they left the Reception class. Disadvantaged children's outcomes were especially weak, with less than a third reaching a good level of development. Currently, too few children are well prepared for the demands of the key stage 1 curriculum.
- Leaders' monitoring and work within the early years are not bringing about the positive changes needed, rapidly enough. Actions are not sharply enough focused upon improving the quality of teaching. Teaching and learning within the early learning goals of reading, writing and number are weak.
- Children are not making the progress that adults should expect of them from their different starting points. Teachers do not use assessment information skilfully to plan tasks and learning that demand enough of children, particularly in Reception. They pay too little heed to children's prior learning and existing knowledge.
- Adults' expectations for children's learning are too low and, as a result, learning indoors and outside does not provide sufficient challenge. When opportunities and learning tasks fail to meet their needs, children wander or their attention drifts. Too often they flit from area to area, wasting time and learning little. Overall, too few children access the learning and opportunities that they need to make good progress.
- Not all adults in the early years build successfully on children's phonics knowledge. Reading books and writing tasks are not consistently well matched to children's needs. Some adults do not pronounce sounds clearly enough. They do not insist that children articulate sounds precisely. Children's misconceptions are not addressed promptly as they apply their knowledge of sounds to reading and writing.
- Children usually behave well throughout the early years environment. They are happy and resourceful. However, some children lose focus and their attention drifts when their learning needs are not met and/or tasks fail to excite their interests. They do, however, respond politely and promptly to adults' direction and requests.
- Staff are kind, caring and vigilant. They make sure that children are kept safe and free from harm. Staff understand, for example, the big difference in development needs between two-year-olds and others. Those working with two-year-olds ensure that children's care, hygiene and personal needs are managed successfully.
- There are some stronger pockets of teaching and learning, especially within Nursery. This means that a steadily increasing proportion of children are entering the Reception class with the skills, knowledge and abilities that are typical for their age. Currently,

however, staff are not capitalising upon this.

School details

Unique reference number	114071
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10089018

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	Maintained
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	328
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Emma Lowes
Headteacher	Lou Dollings
Telephone number	01429 880 349
Website	www.bluebellmeadow.school
Email address	bluebellmeadow@durhamlearning.net
Date of previous inspection	23–24 June 2009

Information about this school

- Following an amalgamation of three local schools in 2016, two infants and one junior, this is now a larger-than-average-sized primary school catering for pupils from two to 11 years of age. It occupies two sites, at Trimdon Grange and Trimdon Village.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. There are very few pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by pupil premium funding is higher than other schools nationally.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND who receive additional support is just above the national average. The proportion of pupils with SEND who have an education, health and care plan is lower than the national average.
- There have been significant changes in leadership and staffing since the last inspection. A headteacher and deputy headteacher were appointed in 2018. Most

subject leaders and governors are new to post.

- There will be no provision for two-year-olds from September 2019.
- The local authority is working intensively with the school to support its development.

Information about this inspection

- Teaching and learning were observed across each site and all key stages over both days of the inspection. Several observations were undertaken jointly by inspectors and senior leaders.
- Inspectors talked with parents face-to-face during the inspection. The views expressed by 42 parents in the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, were also considered.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read, scrutinised their work and talked with pupils during lesson observations. The views expressed by pupils during more formal discussions were also taken into account.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and subject leaders, teaching staff and representatives from the local authority as well as governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- A wide range of the school's own information and documentation was studied, including self-evaluation documents, improvement and subject action plans and records of the checks made on teaching and learning. Information about safeguarding practices was examined, alongside policy documentation.
- The opinions of staff were taken into account through formal and informal discussions.

Inspection team

Fiona Manuel, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kate Byrne	Ofsted Inspector
Gill Wild	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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