

# Inspection of Fir Tree Primary School and Nursery

Fir Tree Lane, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 2RA

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Inspection dates: 11 and 12 May 2022

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils are very happy at school. They enjoy their lessons because teachers think very carefully about how they will make learning engaging. Pupils feel included and valued, including those who are part of the school's specially resourced provision for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. Pupils are confident that school adults will keep them safe.

Senior leaders have worked with staff to raise expectations for every child. This work started with behaviour. All pupils now understand the positive behaviours expected from them. They know that the choices they make affect the whole school community. Pupils now work together with staff to create a positive learning environment. Classrooms are settled, calm and purposeful. Pupils move around the school safely and sensibly. Pupils have developed positive attitudes towards their learning. They are proud of the work they produce.

Pupils told inspectors that as a school, they stood united against bullying. They know when pupil anti-bullying ambassadors would be able to help resolve a playground worry, but they also know exactly when they would need to speak to an adult.

Parents recognise the passion of staff and leaders. They say that since her appointment, the headteacher has transformed the school. Parents feel that recent improvements to the outdoor space are really making a difference, particularly following the pandemic when children were not able to play outdoors as often.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

With support from the multi-academy trust, the headteacher has brought about significant improvement since the last inspection. She has led the redevelopment of the whole curriculum. The teaching of mathematics is now a real strength. Leaders have introduced a well-sequenced curriculum in mathematics. They are clear about the important knowledge, skills, concepts and procedures that pupils need to learn. Following the pandemic, leaders have made further adaptations to the curriculum to ensure that it focuses on the important things and addresses any gaps in knowledge and understanding that arose because of missed schooling. Almost all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are now achieving well in mathematics.

Senior leaders know that over time, too many pupils have not been taught to read effectively. This has led to many pupils becoming disenchanted with reading. Leaders remain determined to tackle underachievement in reading. However, some of this work has been slowed by the pandemic. In January 2022, leaders introduced a new phonics programme. This is having a positive impact on pupils' developing phonics knowledge and understanding. Leaders know that pupils, particularly pupils with SEND and pupils who struggle to learn to read, still need more practice reading and re-reading books that match the letter-sound correspondences they know, both

at school and home. Leaders ensure that right from the start of Nursery, children are read high-quality stories daily. Older pupils also enjoy the texts that their teachers select and regularly read to them. This is helping more pupils to develop their enjoyment of reading.

The wider English curriculum has been redeveloped. A strong focus on oracy throughout the school has supported pupils to develop their confidence in sharing their ideas and views. Leaders have introduced a new approach to writing, which is underpinned by high-quality texts. Teachers now have higher expectations for pupils' writing, and they know how to support and encourage pupils with their writing.

Outside mathematics and English, there is more variability in the quality of education that pupils receive. In science, for example, there is a clear and well-sequenced curriculum, but teachers do not always have the subject knowledge they need to deliver it as leaders intend. In other subjects, the curriculum is not yet fully developed and logically sequenced. This is also true of the early years curriculum. Senior school, and trust executive, leaders understand exactly what needs to be done to address this and have clear plans in place to complete this curriculum design work.

Leaders have carefully considered the development of the wider curriculum to ensure that pupils benefit from a rich and broad range of experiences. They want their pupils to engage locally and beyond. There is a broad club offer, which carefully takes account of the needs of pupils. For example, a teacher has set up a club that aims to provide pupils with some of the experiences they might have missed due to the pandemic. Pupils are supported to make a positive contribution to the school community. For example, pupils in Year 4 have recently planned and set up a healthy tuck shop for the whole school.

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher and chief executive officer are passionate and committed. Along with trustees, and local governors, they share a clear vision and common moral purpose. They want to provide pupils with an excellent and enriching education that prepares them well for the next stages of their education. At the last inspection, an external review of governance was recommended. This was carried out in January 2019. The relationships and communications between the trust board and its committees, and the local governing board, have been rationalised and streamlined. There is now real clarity between trustees and local governors in respect of who is accountable for what.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a clear and coherent culture of safeguarding in the school. Senior leaders have a very good understanding of the school's community context and the particular risks that pupils might face. Staff receive a thorough safeguarding training package. They particularly appreciate the weekly safeguarding scenarios that the headteacher uses to develop and extend their understanding. This training and

regular discussion mean that staff know exactly what to look out for and, when they are concerned about a pupil, they know precisely what to do. When staff do raise a concern, each concern is carefully triaged by school leaders, and referrals are made appropriately.

Safeguarding records are well maintained, detailed and thorough. They clearly show how the school works with external safeguarding partners to help keep children safe. Senior leaders ensure that safer recruitment processes are followed. Staff understand how to raise a concern about an adult within the school. Concerns about adults are effectively managed.

Pupils learn about staying safe online and about healthy relationships and are well supported with their mental health and well-being.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- The early years curriculum is not yet fully developed. Where it is more developed, it is not being consistently implemented to enable children to benefit from meaningful learning across the seven areas of learning. This means that children in early years are not being sufficiently well prepared for the next phase of their education. Leaders must continue their work to ensure that the early years curriculum is coherently mapped and sequenced. They then must ensure that across Nursery and Reception, their intended curriculum is taught in a logical progression, systematically and in a way that is explained effectively, so that it gives children the necessary foundations for the rest of their schooling.
- Pupils, particularly the weakest readers, do not get enough practice reading and re-reading books that precisely and consistently match the letter-sound correspondences they know. This means that they are not able to practice and apply their phonics knowledge with the necessary frequency to become fluent and confident readers. Leaders must ensure that well-trained staff provide all pupils, but particularly the weakest readers, with regular opportunities to apply their phonics knowledge in the context of reading a book that is precisely matched to the letter-sound correspondences pupils know.
- In some foundation subjects, curriculum thinking is not as well developed. In these subjects, curriculum sequencing is not always logical, and it is not always clear what leaders intend pupils will learn over time in each subject. This means that teachers do not always understand what to emphasise and help pupils to retain in their long-term memories. Leaders must now ensure that all subject curriculums set out the knowledge that leaders have identified as most useful. They must ensure that this content is taught in a logical progression, systematically and explicitly enough for all pupils to acquire the intended knowledge and skills. Leaders know that they will need to continue to develop teacher subject knowledge in line with their intended curriculum. For this reason, the transitional arrangements have been applied.

- Too many pupils do not attend school well enough. Leaders, and those with responsibility for attendance, know their families extremely well and understand the range of factors that contribute to some pupils' poor attendance. Leaders are proactive and thorough in the support and challenge they provide to families in relation to attendance. As a result, some pupils' attendance is rapidly improving. Leaders need to maintain their focus on all pupils and families who are vulnerable to poor attendance, particularly where there is not an improving picture.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139081
<b>Local authority</b>	West Berkshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10227473
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	205
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Alison Mitchell
<b>Headteacher</b>	Lindsay Wood
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.firtreeschool.co.uk">www.firtreeschool.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	31 October and 1 November 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school has a specially resourced provision for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. Pupils in the provision are integrated into the school's mainstream classrooms for approximately 70% of each school day.
- The school is using one registered alternative education provider.
- The school provide a breakfast club for pupils on the school roll.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. Inspectors also met with the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, who is the executive headteacher of the school.

- Inspectors spoke with those responsible for governance, including the chair of trustees and several local governors. Inspectors spoke with representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, science and religious education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors listened to pupils reading and talked to pupils across the school about their love of reading.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about a range of additional subjects and the curriculum for early years.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record and spoke to leaders, staff and pupils. Inspectors also spoke with the local authority about their confidence in the school's safeguarding arrangements. Throughout the inspection, inspectors considered and checked the culture of safeguarding within the school.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plans, an external review of governance and recent minutes from meetings of the trust board.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their learning, what behaviour is like at school and whether they felt safe at school.
- Inspectors reviewed 18 responses to the parent survey, including the free-text comments that parents made. Inspectors also spoke to parents and carers at the start of the first day of the inspection.

## **Inspection team**

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Alan Derry

Her Majesty's Inspector

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