

Lower Farm Primary School

Bakewell Close, Bloxwich, Walsall, WS3 3QH

Inspection dates 7–8 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires Improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Teaching has not been good enough over time to improve pupils' achievement since the previous inspection from Reception Year to Year 5.
- Progress is slower in mathematics than in English in these year groups.
- Teachers sometimes set work for that is too easy for some pupils. At other times pupils are confused because teachers do not check that all pupils understand what they are learning. As a result they lose concentration.
- In the Reception class, the outdoor area is not used well enough to develop all aspects of children's learning.
- Governors and leaders do not do enough to check how well teachers, including the headteacher, are performing and to link pay to pupils' progress.
- Teachers are not set challenging targets to help them improve their skills and quicken pupils' progress.
- The governing body is not doing enough to check that school leaders are making improvements to the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and her team have brought about some improvements to the quality of teaching.
- Staff morale is high and all share an ambition to improve achievement for all learners.
- Pupils feel safe, behave well for the most part and show respect for one another and adults.
- Children in the Nursery get off to a good start to their education.
- Pupils in Year 6 make good progress because they are consistently well taught.
- Pupils' attendance is above average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 20 lessons. Four of these were lessons observed with senior leaders. One whole-school assembly was observed.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work, looked at pupils’ work and heard pupils read. Discussions were held with pupils. Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 41 responses to the online parents’ and carers’ questionnaire (Parent View), two letters from parents and carers received during the inspection, 16 questionnaires completed by teachers and a letter from the Chair of the Governing Body.
- Documents scrutinised during the inspection included the school’s summary of its self-evaluation, the development plan, teachers’ planning, information about pupils’ progress and routine record keeping.

Inspection team

Sarah Conway, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Nina Bee	Additional inspector
Chris Ogden	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (extra money given to schools for pupils entitled to free school meals amongst others) is below average.
- Most pupils come from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.
- The current headteacher was appointed as acting headteacher in January 2012. Her position became permanent in September 2012. The acting deputy headteacher was appointed in January 2012. There is a new Chair of the Governing Body.
- Two senior leaders have recently been appointed to new roles, one in an acting capacity. At the time of the inspection, four other teachers were employed on temporary contracts.
- A National Leader in Education has been working with the school since January 2012 to improve teaching.
- The school provides breakfast and after-school clubs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to good so that pupils' progress quickens by ensuring that:
 - activities in lessons are planned to be at exactly the right level for the differing needs of pupils, particularly in mathematics
 - teachers regularly check learning in lessons and make sure that pupils understand what they are doing
 - teachers' expectations are raised and their questioning involves pupils of all abilities and enables all pupils to learn
 - teachers keep a close check on how well pupils are doing in relation to their targets.
- Improve the provision in Reception by using the outdoor area more effectively to support children's learning in all areas of their learning.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - pupils' progress in every year group is checked more carefully so that swift action can be taken if progress slows in any part of the school
 - teachers receive clear points for action about how to improve their teaching and are monitored closely so that they improve at a fast pace
 - lateness, repeated absence and incidents of poor behaviour are recorded in sufficient detail so that the school can ensure problems are dealt with effectively.
- Improve governance by giving governors more information and better training so that they:
 - understand more clearly what teaching and progress are like across the school in order to hold leaders to account for the performance of the school
 - ensure that judgements about teachers' salaries and promotions are properly linked to the impact teachers have in improving pupils' progress and raising standards
 - evaluate how well money is spent to improve achievement, especially the pupil premium.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Some pupils in Years 1 to 5 do not make enough progress in English and mathematics. Some are working at below the levels expected for their year groups even though most children enter the school with skills and knowledge typical for their ages. Progress is slower in mathematics than in English.
- In some lessons in Years 1 to 5, pupils do not learn well enough because work is too hard or too easy for them.
- Progress is better in the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly in the Nursery.
- Pupils' progress accelerates markedly in Year 6 because pupils are taught in small groups with carefully focused work. As a result attainment is above average by the time pupils leave the school.
- The pupil premium funding is used to target the pupils for whom it is intended in Years 6 and who have fallen behind. This enables them to make rapid progress. In 2012 their attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 shows that the attainment gap with all pupils nationally had closed.
- The school continues to use the pupil premium to fund additional staff, so that pupils in Years 5 and 6 can be taught in smaller groups for parts of lessons to help those who have fallen behind to catch up.
- Leaders and managers have focused on standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 and there is a rising trend in the school's results. However, attainment in other year groups is more variable. The school's test results mask differences in progress for pupils of different abilities. For example, higher and lower attaining pupils do not always do as well as they should because work is not always set at the right level for them.
- Provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs has recently been reviewed. These pupils are starting to make better progress because teaching assistants usually make sure they understand the work.
- Although reading standards were above average at the end of Year 2 in summer 2012, pupils' ability to connect sounds to letters was below average in Year 1. Teachers have recently introduced a whole-school initiative to promote the enjoyment of reading. Pupils' planners are used to record personal targets to improve reading and pupils say they enjoy reading. Pupils now have reading logs, which are used by pupils, parents and carers and teachers to comment on their reading.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because in Year 1 to 5 teachers do not always provide pupils with work that is hard enough to enable them to make good progress. They do not always check that pupils know what to do, and sometimes they become confused as a result. Teachers do not use questioning well enough to challenge pupils to reach higher standards.
- In addition, planning and teaching in Reception do not always focus well on children's different abilities and needs. As a result, work is not always finely tuned to be at exactly the right level. Pupils learn, but not rapidly enough. In addition, children do not always have enough opportunity to learn outdoors. Though there were some positive examples, children are not routinely encouraged to share equipment and consider each other's feelings when they are playing together.
- In weaker lessons, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough and they often set the same tasks for the whole class without offering sufficient challenge to the

more able. They do not always notice and take rapid action when less-able pupils are confused and unable to start their work. As a result, some pupils become demotivated and make little progress.

- Reading is routinely taught in small ability groups but teachers do not check closely enough on the progress that individuals make in these groups. Comments recorded in these sessions and in reading logs are not linked to pupils' targets so opportunities to identify how well they are doing are missed. Nevertheless, pupils are learning to use their knowledge of letters and sounds to read unfamiliar words and read back to correct what they have said.
- Some teachers do not routinely reinforce pupils' understanding of the links between sounds and letters, or take the opportunity to promote writing skills and encourage pupils to write at length. These are again valuable opportunities missed to accelerate the rate at which pupils learn.
- Where teaching is good, teachers plan activities which are designed to ensure pupils of different abilities are challenged to make good progress. For example, in one mathematics lesson, pupils were highly motivated to take up the challenge of tackling a task given to a higher ability group once they had completed their own task successfully. In these lessons, pupils are confident to offer help to each other and are clear about how to check how well they are doing.
- Children who attend the Nursery get off to a good start because interesting and well-resourced activities are planned. As a result children are confident and engage well with adults and each other.
- Books are marked regularly but the quality of teachers' marking is variable. Most books have evidence of pupils assessing their own and others' work. There is some good evidence of marking in which teachers give clear guidance on what pupils should do to improve. Comments are not routinely linked to pupils' English and mathematics targets.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally positive but in weaker lessons pupils lose concentration and do not always respond quickly enough to the teacher.
- Pupils say they enjoy school but poor presentation in their work does not always reflect the pride they say they have in their school.
- Bullying is rare and pupils are adamant that they feel safe from any form of harassment or discrimination.
- Attendance is above average but lateness and repeated absence are not always recorded accurately which makes it difficult for staff to follow up. Similarly, although there are few incidents of poor behaviour recorded there is little evidence of follow-up action.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and they are polite and courteous when moving around the school. They show respect and tolerance for each other.
- Parents and carers are supportive of the school and agree that their children are safe in school.
- The breakfast and after-school clubs are well attended. Pupils socialise in a safe and happy environment.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement. Although some positive action has been taken to tackle the school's weaknesses, leaders and managers do not have a sufficiently realistic view about how the school is doing and have focussed too much on ensuring that pupils catch up in Year 6.
- The headteacher has the confidence of the staff and has rightly concentrated on improving teaching. However, leaders' evaluations of teaching have not taken sufficient account of the impact teaching is having on the progress pupils make in different year groups. Information

about the progress of individual pupils is not shared or understood by all staff and governors.

- Nevertheless, systems have been improved and the headteacher has had some success in raising expectations and improving teaching and learning with support from the local authority through the National Leader in Education. Although these improvements have not had time to result in uniformly good teaching and progress, they demonstrate that the school has the capacity to improve.
- Steps have been taken to improve the evaluation of teaching with some success. However, monitoring is not yet robust enough and does not always link the quality of teaching closely enough to pupils' progress and teachers are not given clear targets for improvement. Documentation has been produced to check teaching against the Teaching Standards and link the quality of teaching to teachers' pay but this has yet to be applied. As a result, teachers are not being held sufficiently to account for the progress of their pupils.
- The pupil premium is used with some success in Years 5 and 6 to close gap with all pupils nationally at the end of Year 6.
- New appointments have strengthened leadership and governance. All staff and governors share in their determination to improve achievement in the school. Senior leaders are developing in their role and beginning to play a part in monitoring how well teachers help pupils to progress well.
- The school meets the statutory requirements for the safeguarding of pupils.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors' training has not had enough impact. The governing body's involvement in performance management is not good enough. It has not yet set targets for the headteacher nor insisted that teachers are given clear targets linked to pay. The governing body does not know the school well enough to offer sufficient challenge to senior leaders for the school's performance. Governors do not have enough information about progress to be sure whether the money spent on the pupil premium is making a difference.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	104169
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	404929

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	404
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Reverend Bev Boden
Headteacher	Sarah Milner
Date of previous school inspection	6–7 July 2011
Telephone number	01922 710479
Fax number	01922 491939
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