

Hillmead Primary School

Woburn Avenue, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 4PW

Inspection dates 14–15 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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 across the school is inconsistent and not enough of it is good.
- Teachers do not always plan their lessons to make sure pupils build on what they already know, which limits their progress, especially for the more-able pupils.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs do not make enough progress because the work and help they have is not always closely matched to their abilities.
- Behaviour requires improvement because teachers do not always set high enough expectations for pupils to work hard and behave well. Teachers do not always correct unacceptable behaviour.
- The teaching of letters and sounds (phonics) to help pupils with reading and spelling is not yet regular and rigorous. Consequently, younger children do not develop these skills at a good rate.
- Some teaching assistants do not have good enough subject knowledge to support literacy effectively.
- Vacancies among senior leaders mean the rate of improvement is not rapid enough.

The school has the following strengths

- The school has experienced a recent period of considerable upheaval. Under the astute leadership of the part-time acting headteacher and governing body, the decline in pupils' progress and attainment has been halted. The school is back on track and improving steadily.
- In Year 6, where teachers' expectations are high, behaviour is outstanding. These pupils are good ambassadors for their school.
- Pupils' progress is improving and is good in Year 6.
- The deputy headteacher provides strong leadership and is helping most staff to improve their teaching.
- Almost all parents and carers who voiced their views agree that their children are happy and safe at school. They are very pleased with recent improvements in communication with the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 11 lessons and groups of pupils or individuals working with learning support assistants or teachers. They looked in on pupils during lunchtime and visited mid-morning break times.
- Inspectors looked closely at pupils' work in all year groups and heard some pupils from Years 1 and 2 reading.
- They held meetings with staff, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and groups of pupils from Years 2 and 6. They spoke informally with many pupils during lessons and at break times.
- Inspectors looked carefully at safeguarding documentation, information about pupils' progress, self-evaluation documents and development plans.
- The views of 90 parents and carers who completed the online questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into consideration, as were the views of parents and carers who wrote to inspectors and others who spoke with inspectors at the start of school.

Inspection team

Cheryl Thompson, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kanwaljit Singh

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school with eight classes, including a morning-only Nursery class. The school serves the local community.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- No pupils are currently educated in alternative provision away from the school site.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well-below average. This extra funding is for looked-after children, those known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils from service families.
- Four members of the teaching staff have joined the school since the last inspection, including the deputy headteacher. Two of them started their teaching career as newly qualified teachers at Hillmead.
- In the last four months the school has had considerable changes to its senior management. The previous headteacher and two senior leaders, one of whom was also the special educational needs coordinator, have left the school. At the time of the inspection, two teaching vacancies were covered by supply teachers.
- An acting headteacher was brought in by the local authority and works in the school two-and-a-half-days per week. The deputy headteacher leads the school for the remainder of the week.
- The local authority has secured the continued services of the acting headteacher for the summer term, 2013. The recently appointed headteacher who will take over the school in September 2013 will also be working in the school for one day per week to ensure a smooth handover.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to a consistently good level by making sure that:
 - teachers check how well pupils are getting on in lessons with their work and adjust their teaching in the light of their progress
 - teachers always provide the more-able pupils with work to make them think hard and make good progress
 - all leaders check rigorously on the quality of teaching to make sure that inconsistencies are dealt with swiftly.
- Increase the consistency in pupils' progress and raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - in the Nursery and Reception classes, placing greater emphasis on developing children's early literacy skills and equipping teaching assistants with the skills needed to make an even better contribution to children's learning in these areas
 - making sure that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs have work and support at just the right level for them.
- Improve pupils' behaviour by making sure that:
 - all teachers follow the school's new behaviour policy
 - all teachers and learning support assistants expect pupils to listen carefully and work at a

good rate

- older pupils are trained as buddies to help deal sensibly and fairly with minor playground squabbles.
- Increase the impact of leadership and management on the rate of school improvement by:
- making rigorous use of the systems that hold teachers to account for the progress of pupils
 - providing more coaching for teachers who need help with their lesson planning
 - appointing subject leaders for mathematics and information and communication technology in order that they can check rigorously on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress in these subjects.
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Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Almost all children enter the Nursery and Reception classes with skills that are above those typical of their age. Their learning requires improvement because they do not have enough opportunities to learn early literacy skills and phonics. Similarly, not enough attention is paid to details such as making sure children learn to use a suitable pencil grip and the correct formation of letters.
- Results of national teacher assessments at the end of Year 2 and national tests at the end of Year 6, indicate that results are usually significantly better than in schools nationally. However, results in 2012 dropped to above average. The proportion of Year 1 pupils doing well in the 2012 phonics screening check was lower than that found nationally.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that their rate of progress is no longer declining and that standards are rising again to the school's usual level in Year 6. This is because of the relentless drive of the acting headteacher and deputy headteacher. The outstanding teaching for Year 6 pupils means that they are making consistently good progress. Elsewhere, the rate of progress is uneven.
- When disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs work in small groups with learning support assistants they usually make good progress. In class, though, they make similar progress to their classmates. The work they have does not always match their abilities and sometimes they struggle.
- Pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium make similar progress to their classmates. Within the school, very few pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals, which makes it hard to compare their performance with others. In some years these pupils attain better than pupils in this group nationally and in others they do not.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- There are differences in the quality of teaching across the school. Sometimes the tasks set are not sufficiently demanding, so pupils are not expected to think hard and come up with solutions. This is particularly the case for more-able pupils.
- Teaching for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs requires improvement. When these pupils are taught in small groups by learning support assistants, they usually make good progress because the activities are closely matched to what the pupils need to learn. In class sessions, however, their learning requires improvement because not enough attention is paid to planning work at the right level for them.
- The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher have helped teachers to improve their knowledge of how well pupils are learning. However, there is more improvement needed because work is not always precisely matched to what pupils need to learn next and teachers do not always notice their response to learning and make changes in the lesson. Consequently, more-able pupils are not always challenged to think hard and pupils who find learning difficult sometimes struggle.
- Throughout the school, relationships are good. Pupils say that they feel safe and that if they have any concerns, their teachers would help them. Good links with parents and carers are established to help children settle happily into the Nursery and Reception classes. Class teachers

provide parents with newsletters about what pupils have been learning in class. Teachers also provide their e-mail addresses so that parents can make contact should they need to do so. Inspectors' discussions with parents show that they are very pleased with these arrangements.

- The school has very recently introduced a systematic approach to teaching phonics. Staff are still developing their expertise so there is currently little impact of the new approach. What can be said, is that where the teaching of phonics is good, pupils make good progress in linking letters to sounds.
- The teaching of reading requires improvement because phonics are not yet taught consistently well. As a result, pupils who struggle with reading have few strategies to help them work out how to read unfamiliar words. The school has a large amount of reading books and resources. Parents play an important role in speeding up progress by hearing their child read at home.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- The main reason why pupils' behaviour requires improvement is because teachers' expectations of them are inconsistent. For example, teachers do not always insist during class discussions that pupils listen carefully to instructions, which means some of them do not know exactly how to go about their tasks.
- Where teaching requires improvement and the pace of the lesson slows, pupils are not always expected to work to the best of their abilities. Their books show that teachers do not always encourage them to take care with how they present their work.
- Where teachers set high expectations and insist these are met, as in Year 6, pupils respond extremely well. For example, in an 'everybody writes' session, pupils listened carefully to what it was their teacher expected them to include in their writing and worked hard to do so.
- Pupils like school and older pupils say they feel safe. They have a good understanding of what constitutes various forms of bullying, including through mobile phones and e-mails, even though they say none goes on in school.
- Younger pupils also like school but voiced concerns about too many 'squabbles' in the playground. They said that they know that any member of staff will help them if they are worried.
- Pupils have a good idea of how to keep themselves safe, fit and healthy. Older pupils are very aware of how to keep themselves safe when using the internet.
- Attendance is consistently above average, reflecting pupils' enjoyment of school.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The reason that leadership and management are not good is that considerable, recent staff changes have reduced capacity, with the absence of a permanent headteacher, key subject leaders and a special educational needs coordinator.
- Strong and decisive leadership by the acting headteacher, deputy headteacher and governing body have provided stability. They share a strong commitment to making sure that all groups of

pupils have an equal chance to do well and there is no discrimination. Together with the deputy headteacher, the acting headteacher is managing the improvements in teaching well.

- In a very short time, they have put in place good systems for checking on the work of the school. The governing body, acting headteacher and deputy headteacher have a very clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve pupils' progress and a resolute determination to do so.
 - Improvements in teaching and achievement across the school are not yet good for three main reasons. Firstly, not all teachers' lesson planning is based on a precise understanding of what their pupils already know and need to learn next. Secondly, the system for holding teachers to account for the progress of pupils has only just been applied rigorously. Thirdly, there are not enough other key leaders to share the work load.
 - For example, the acting headteacher is also taking the role of special educational needs coordinator. She has improved the quality of the pupils' individual education plans but has not had enough time to check how well these are being implemented.
 - A reasonable start has been made on a consistent approach to teaching phonics, but more work has to be done to refine teachers' practice in order to have a good impact on progress across the school. Some teaching assistants lack the subject knowledge to support pupils in making good progress.
 - The way subjects are planned and taught meets the needs of pupils reasonably well. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their topic work, which has an international focus.
 - The local authority has provided good support for the school. It acted quickly to find a very experienced headteacher to take over the school temporarily as acting headteacher. The governing body have appointed a headteacher to take over the school in September 2013. The local authority is making sure that the acting headteacher, deputy headteacher and incoming headteacher can work together during the summer term 2013 for a smooth transition and to see that recent improvements are continued.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are thorough in making sure they perform their legal duties, including the safe recruiting and vetting of staff. They know the school well and make good use of their individual professional expertise in supporting it and asking searching questions. Governors visit frequently and have a good understanding of what performance information tells them about pupils' progress compared with schools nationally. They are well aware of the quality of teaching and the strategies used for helping teachers make further improvement, such as linking pay closely to pupils' achievement, how the school rewards good teaching and deals with any underperformance. They check on spending decisions carefully, including the use and impact of pupil premium funding.
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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	117310
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	403314

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	220
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dan Morgan
Headteacher	Judith Sparks (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	22 April 2008
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