

Tower Primary School

Tower Road, Ware, SG12 7LP

Inspection dates 13–14 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils achieve well from their low starting points on entry to the school. Standards in mathematics have improved markedly after a dip in results last year. This is because of the effective actions taken by the school to raise attainment in reading and mathematics over the past two years.
- The quality of teaching is good overall, with some that is outstanding. This has enabled pupils to make rapid progress in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are supported effectively. As a result, their behaviour improves and they make faster progress in lessons.
- The safeguarding of pupils is given a high priority by the school. Consequently, pupils feel safe in school. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school and demonstrate positive attitudes towards their learning.
- The headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, has been successful in improving the quality of teaching further, raising achievement significantly in reading and mathematics across the school.
- The governors carry out their responsibilities effectively and are confident in holding leaders to account for the school's performance.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not consistently provide sufficiently challenging work for all groups of pupils, especially for the higher-attaining pupils.
- Marking does not always give pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work, and even where the next steps for improvement are given, pupils do not always get the opportunity to respond.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed nine lessons, four of which were seen together with the headteacher. In addition, the inspector made a number of other short visits to lessons and learning areas. The inspector also listened to pupils in Years 2 and 6 reading to her.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, school leaders and managers, a group of pupils, two members of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector took account of 20 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 22 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspector scrutinised the school's data about students' achievement, examined records relating to behaviour and attendance, school improvement planning and looked at documents used by leaders to monitor and evaluate the school's performance. The inspector also examined the records relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Tusha Chakraborti, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Tower Primary is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils are of white British heritage. The proportion of pupils who are of minority ethnic heritage and who speak English as an additional language is below the national average. Very few are at the early stage of speaking English.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides funding for children in the care of local authority and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is double the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action as well as those supported through school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school experiences high mobility of pupils. Several pupils join or leave the school part way through the academic year, particularly in Key Stage 2.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching to accelerate pupils' progress and raise achievement further by:
 - ensuring that teachers consistently use assessment information to plan activities that always provide sufficient challenge for all groups of pupils, especially for more-able learners
 - making sure that all pupils are given clear guidance as to the next steps in their learning, and that they are routinely given time to act upon the guidance.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start the school with levels of skills and understanding that are much below those expected for their age. They make good progress and, by the end of the Reception class, many achieve age-related expectations in all areas of learning.
- By the end of Year 6, pupils achieve standards in English and mathematics that are average, and have been over some time. The 2012 Year 6 national test results dipped in mathematics, partly due to high pupil mobility in Years 3 to 6. The school responded rapidly to resolve this issue by raising standards of the quality of teaching through a very effective staff training programme. The school's data on pupils' progress for the current year and the work seen in their books and lessons show that progress in English and mathematics has accelerated over the past two years and pupils are on track to reach higher standards at the end of Year 6.
- The school has now implemented an effective reading programme which it started in 2011 in collaboration with the local authority. This has rapidly improved pupils' reading and writing skills. Pupils in Year 1 and 2 apply their knowledge of phonics (the sounds that letters make) to pronounce unfamiliar words and show good understanding of the stories they read. Older pupils read widely, develop good research skills and apply their literacy skills in other subjects successfully. Year 6 pupils, for example, were able to write about the use of robots for different purposes following their research work during the information and communication technology lesson. A strong focus on mental mathematics and investigation is helping pupils to acquire good problem-solving skills.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are making progress in line with that made by similar pupils nationally. Those with statements of special educational needs for their emotional and behavioural difficulties are supported effectively by the teaching assistants who help them to manage their behaviour successfully. Consequently, these pupils are making faster progress, increasingly closing the gaps between different groups of pupils.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium who make expected progress is consistently in-line with national figures. However, because of the small numbers of pupils in each year group, the average attainment varies considerably from year-to-year. In 2012 pupils, on average, were five terms behind their classmates in English and seven terms behind them in mathematics. However, current data shows that most of these pupils are making good progress and the gap is narrowing rapidly. The additional funding has been spent on staff who are providing support for individuals or small groups of pupils. Pupils who are from minority ethnic backgrounds, or speak English as an additional language, achieve in line with their peers.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching has been good over time and is improving further as a result of concerted actions from senior leaders. Most parents and carers rightly think that teaching is good and evidence shows good teaching underpins pupils' good progress in English and mathematics.
- In Reception, children are helped to become confident learners in pursuing activities of their own choice as well as those directed by adults through a balanced indoor and outdoor programme. Children work co-operatively and are confident in explaining their work. Some children enthusiastically described how they planted seeds and what they need to do to ensure

the seeds to grow into plants. Many were able to record the results as they observed the seeds growing.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. In the best lessons, teachers make sure pupils are fully involved in their learning by asking searching questions that make them think hard as well as assessing their understanding. They build effectively on pupils' prior learning, drawing on the knowledge and skills that pupils gain in other subjects. In a mathematics lesson in Year 6, pupils explored the links between mathematical patterns and art and investigated how they could rotate and repeat patterns to create their own designs. This was well linked to their previous work on art and patterns in nature.
- The teaching of reading is strong. Guided reading sessions are used well to deepen pupils' understanding of a range of stories, analysing the impact of key events and characters. In Year 1, pupils develop good understanding of fiction and information texts and know how to use a glossary to find information.
- Teachers usually plan tasks that are well matched to the learning needs of pupils but this is not consistently so. Opportunities are missed to challenge and extend skills and understanding of all groups of pupils consistently. As a result, not all pupils, especially the more-able pupils, achieve as well as they can.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly but do not always include guidance on how to improve it. In some cases, next steps are suggested but pupils are not given time to respond, so they repeat the same mistakes.
- Pupils say they enjoy their learning. This is because their teachers make lessons interesting as well as fun. They are given opportunities to discuss their learning and the quality of these discussions is good.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The school is an inclusive community, welcoming and supporting pupils within a culture of mutual respect. There is no discrimination within the school. Pupils are proud of their school and grow up as confident learners.
- Pupils behave well and get on well with learning in lessons without disruption. They are keen to learn and say that they 'learn a lot' as result of good teaching.
- Pupils feel safe at school. They say that incidents of bullying are rare and are confident that adults deal with them fairly and effectively, should they occur. Most parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire said that behaviour was good and their children are kept safe at school.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe because the school includes issues about safety through its teaching and work with parents consistently. Pupils are well aware of cyber-bullying and show a good understanding of issues relating to the dangers of misusing drugs, stating that 'You can only take prescription drugs'.
- Pupils develop a strong sense of responsibility and are well involved in improving the school. For example, school council has initiated the installation of a compost bin to keep the school environmentally friendly and a log cabin in the playground has been renovated to be used as 'Reading Den' where pupils read books during playtime.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, along with other senior leaders, communicates high expectations of staff and pupils. Leaders focus relentlessly on improving teaching, resulting in teaching that is at least good and sometimes outstanding. They successfully deal with the difficulties arising from high pupil mobility over the years through rigorous monitoring of progress ensuring that these pupils progress as well as they can during their time in Tower Primary.
- Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is effective and children are able to settle quickly and make good progress.
- Leaders act decisively in tackling any underachievement through a range of strategies. This means that the improvement planning is appropriately focused on raising pupils' achievement further. The success of this process is clear from the faster progress pupils have made in reading and mathematics over the past year. Leaders demonstrate the capacity for further improvement.
- The quality of teaching is monitored effectively against challenging individual annual performance targets for staff. Well-planned programmes of training, for example, to raise the expertise of staff in reading and mathematics, have helped teachers to improve their work. Teachers are well aware that pay rises and promotion depend on how effectively they help pupils to achieve.
- Teaching across different subjects makes a good contribution to the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy as well as their personal skills. Very effective links between different subjects make pupils' learning exciting and meaningful. Pupils enjoy exploring the links between mathematics and art and the use of technology to enhance their learning in other subjects. Several pupils explained how well they learnt about 'coasts' from their trip to a study centre in Norfolk. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through the teaching of different subjects, including religious studies.
- The local authority has provided good support. The school works closely with them in implementing strategies to raise standards in reading and mathematics.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors are committed to the school and have an accurate awareness of pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. They are allocated with an aspect of school development plan and there have been regular visits by governors to check on progress on the identified areas. They set challenging objectives for the headteacher and have full confidence in her in moving the school forward. They support and challenge leaders in asking searching questions about how teachers are rewarded for good performance and how underperformance is tackled to raise achievement. They ensure that pupil premium is spent wisely on extra support and activities to help eligible pupils to catch up. Governors make sure that requirements for safeguarding and safe recruitment of staff are implemented effectively. They review the procedures regularly to ensure that they fully meet national requirements.

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	117275
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	412937

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	116
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Allen
Headteacher	Carole Thorpe
Date of previous school inspection	27 November 2008
Telephone number	01920 411000
Fax number	01920 486613
Email address	admin@tower.herts.sch.uk

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