

# Commonswood Primary and Nursery School

The Commons, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 4RU

## Inspection dates

2–3 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
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

- Pupils do not make enough progress in writing, and many lack a sufficient grounding in grammar to underpin high quality writing. The marking of writing also requires improvement.
- Teaching has too many inconsistencies to promote good achievement across the school. Leaders have improved teaching over the last year, but not enough to make it good overall.
- There are sometimes weaknesses in the pace of lessons, and in the level of difficulty of work given to pupils.
- Links between learning in different subjects are not planned systematically to fully enhance pupils' understanding and knowledge. Opportunities to consolidate and extend their learning in this way are missed.

### The school has the following strengths

- Pupils make good progress in reading and mathematics. Achievement in these areas has risen since the last inspection.
- Pupils greatly enjoy school, behave well and get on very well with each other and with staff. They feel safe in school, are keen to learn and take a pride in their accomplishments. They have good collaborative skills.
- Attendance has risen sharply during the last year to be a little above average.
- Children get off to a good start in Nursery and Reception, and last year did particularly well in their early literacy skills.
- Leaders have worked well to improve progress in reading and mathematics, and to raise the overall quality of teaching, despite many staff changes. Much teaching is now good and some is outstanding.
- Senior staff and governors have accurately identified the school's remaining needs, and are already implementing plans to address them.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed substantial parts of 18 lessons and also made shorter visits to lessons to look at particular aspects, such as how pupils learn the basic skills of reading.
- The views of 75 parents who responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into consideration, as were those of several parents who wrote to or spoke informally with the team. Twenty one replies to a questionnaire for staff were examined.
- Inspectors had discussions with representatives of the governing body, members of staff and a representative of the local authority. They held formal meetings with pupils from Years 2, 3, 4 and 6 and spoke informally with many others. Several pupils were heard to read.
- The team checked a range of documentation, particularly that relating to behaviour and safety, and records of pupils' progress.
- Samples of pupils' work were analysed, in their books and in displays.
- Inspectors observed pupils in assembly and during break-times.

## Inspection team

Steven Hill, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Pauline MacMillan

Additional Inspector

David Belsey

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This is a larger than average size primary school, with a Nursery that provides part-time education for up to 60 children.
- Most pupils are White British, with an average proportion who come from a range of minority ethnic heritages. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an addition language is below average. Few pupils are at the early stages of learning English.
- The proportion of pupils entitled to support from the pupil premium is average. The pupil premium is extra government funding to help the education of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children who are looked after by the local authority, and some other groups.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs who are supported at school action is slightly above average. The proportion supported at school action plus, or who have a statement of special educational needs, is average.
- The school meets current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Since the last inspection, there have been major changes to staffing, with a new headteacher starting a year ago, and a new deputy headteacher this term. Five other teachers also started this term, including three who are new to the profession and two temporary staff who are covering long-term staff absence.
- There is a private pre-school provision on the school site. This is managed and reported upon separately.

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

- Make teaching more consistent, and so improve achievement, particularly by:
  - ensuring that work is suitably challenging for different groups of pupils throughout lessons
  - keeping up a good pace to learning in the different parts of each lesson, so that pupils make good progress throughout.
- Raise achievement in writing, particularly through:
  - making more extensive use of opportunities for pupils to write in different subjects, in different styles and genres, and for different audiences
  - ensuring that the marking of pupils' writing gives them clear pointers to help them make their next piece of work better, including when marking their writing in subjects other than English
  - improving pupils' understanding and knowledge of grammar, through more systematic teaching of this from an earlier age.
- Implement current plans to enhance pupils' achievement by linking learning in different subjects in a meaningful and systematic way, so that learning in each subject complements and reinforces learning in others.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Pupils do not make enough progress in writing. Too few pupils make the progress they should over time, and fewer still exceed the expected levels. Better teaching is improving pupils' writing, but past underachievement holds them back. They have had too few opportunities in the past to practise writing in different genres and styles, in different subjects. As a consequence their attainment in writing is below average and much lower than in reading and mathematics, which is slightly above average.
- Until recently, far too little attention was paid to developing pupils' understanding of grammar and applying this to their writing. The issue is being addressed, with some excellent work in Year 6, for example, but the extensive gaps in pupils' knowledge mean that many still struggle with this aspect of their writing.
- Children start at the school with skills and understanding that are broadly typical for their ages. They make good progress in Nursery and Reception and, recently, an above-average proportion have reached a good level of development by the end of Reception.
- Pupils make good progress in reading. Following extensive changes by the school, the younger pupils have greatly improved their understanding of phonics (how the sounds in words are represented by different letter combinations). Almost all pupils in Year 1 reached the expected level in the most recent phonics check. By Year 6, pupils are fluent readers who use their skills well to support their learning in other subjects, and are enthusiastic about a range of books.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics is good and improving. Most make the progress expected of them, and many now make more than the expected progress in the subject during Key Stage 2. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are developing well and used effectively to support work in different subjects. They discuss ideas together thoughtfully, which greatly enhances their learning.
- The school's detailed records show that the progress of different groups, including boys and girls, the more-able, those from different ethnic heritages, and those who speak English as an additional language, is generally similar, with strengths in reading and mathematics, but weaknesses in writing. In writing, however, boys lag behind girls in their progress in most year groups.
- Pupils entitled to the pupil premium make broadly the same progress as their classmates in both English and mathematics. Their attainment is generally similar. In 2012, such pupils in Year 6 were a term ahead of their classmates in mathematics, and a term behind in English.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress in reading and mathematics but, like their classmates, do not do well enough in writing.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Inconsistencies in teaching mean that aspects which are strengths in many lessons are weaknesses in others. This is demonstrated by the variable progress that pupils made last year, depending on the subject being taught or the class they were in. Although the large majority of the teaching observed during the inspection was good, with some being outstanding, too much still required improvement.

- Although teachers generally prepare different work for pupils of different abilities, at times, this is not done accurately enough, and the work set is too easy or too hard for some of the class. Sometimes, too, more-able pupils are expected to do the same work as the rest of the class before tackling harder work, when they could have managed this straight away.
- In some lessons, the pace of learning drops for part of the session, and then pupils do not make the progress they should. This was in contrast to the best lessons seen, which were fast paced throughout, so that pupils covered a lot of ground, and made good progress.
- Examples were seen of good quality marking of pupils' work, showing them what they did well and how the work could have been better. However, marking practice is not consistent between classes. In particular, marking frequently fails to tell pupils what they can do to improve their next piece of writing, and teachers seldom mark writing in subjects other than English with the same criteria they use when marking literacy books.
- Teaching is good in the Nursery and Reception classes. Adults are skilled at interacting with children, joining in their play to help them extend their thinking, and enhancing their vocabulary. Lively, fast-paced teaching of phonics gives children a good start to learning to read.
- A key factor in the good progress that pupils make in many lessons is the extensive practice that they have in discussing their ideas together in twos and threes. This helps them sort out their thoughts more clearly, keeps them actively involved in the lesson so they maintain concentration, and develops their speaking and listening skills very well.
- Classes are managed well, based on clear expectations of behaviour and well-established routines, as well as good relationships and mutual respect.
- A strength of much teaching is the way that teachers and skilled teaching assistants monitor the progress of different groups and intervene quickly if anyone is confused. In the best practice seen, adults continually challenge pupils to improve and refine their understanding.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- Pupils enjoy school both socially and academically. A group of pupils from Year 6 who spoke to an inspector quickly identified the most important things about the school as 'learning', 'the teachers' and 'our friends'. Their enjoyment of school is now clearly reflected in much improved attendance figures.
- Pupils have very positive relationships with each other and with staff. Boys and girls from different backgrounds all play together cheerfully, and in class they show good collaborative skills, sharing ideas enthusiastically and amicably. Year 6 pupils take very seriously their responsibilities around the school, particularly for younger children. They are keen to be positive role models and to help these younger pupils to cope with school.
- Pupils concentrate well, listen attentively to staff and to each other, and are keen to succeed. They take a pride in their work, and older pupils are beginning to develop good skills in assessing their own and their classmates' success, giving thoughtful feedback to help each other improve.
- Behaviour is good in class and around the school. A positive working atmosphere pervades lessons and pupils follow routines well. They are very positive about each other's behaviour,

saying that serious lapses in behaviour are rare. They are confident that adults will deal with issues that arise, but older pupils also feel that they can sort out minor arguments peacefully themselves. The school has a strong record of helping pupils who struggle to conform to improve their behaviour and then to make good progress.

- Pupils have a good understanding of bullying and of how this differs from other behavioural lapses. They say that whilst friends sometimes fall out, or someone who is upset or angry about something can be 'mean', such incidents are usually resolved quickly with the help of staff and their friends, and they said that bullying is extremely unusual.
- They feel safe in school and know how to keep themselves safe, having a good understanding of safety on the internet, for example.

### **The leadership and management** requires improvement

- Although senior leaders have successfully improved teaching, attendance and progress in the last year, they have not had enough impact in raising achievement in writing, a weakness identified by the previous inspection. Some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain.
- The impact of the headteacher's actions over the last year demonstrates the school's capacity to improve. The full impact of these is not yet apparent in all areas, despite improvements that have been made on several fronts.
- The school teaches all the subjects it is required to, but there has been no overall plan to link learning in different subjects together, to enhance pupils' understanding and interest. A draft proposal to do this has been drawn up by the new deputy headteacher, and the school intends to implement this over the coming year.
- Members of the restructured leadership team have had extensive training to help them fulfil their responsibilities. Good support has been given by established staff to inexperienced colleagues who have started this term. Subject leaders have had their role expanded and are now making more impact on monitoring and then improving provision. There are now effective systems to manage teachers' performance, making clear links between remuneration and individual targets, linked to pupils' progress.
- Much improved assessment systems show just how well individual pupils and groups are doing, so that extra support can be provided where it is needed. The effectiveness of this is very clear in the more rapid progress made last year in reading and mathematics. This data is now making teachers very clearly accountable for the progress of pupils in their class, and they are responding positively, modifying their practice with advice from senior colleagues.
- Extensive systems to encourage attendance, including the appointment of a family support worker to liaise with parents, have been successful in raising attendance levels. The increased work with parents over the last year has been successful in increasing their involvement in their children's education.
- Pupil premium funding has been used effectively and demonstrates the school's commitment to equal opportunities. The funding has been used successfully to raise standards and improve attendance of this group of students. The funding has also been spent on ensuring all these pupils are fully included in all aspects of school life, as well as providing individual tailored academic or personal help for them to reach their full potential. This spending is monitored well, with individual assessments of impact made for each pupil concerned.

- Over the course of last year, the local authority has given good support to the school, tailoring its help to the school's specific needs in consultation with the headteacher. The success is exemplified by younger pupils' much improved skills in phonics following specific staff training.
- The school has good plans to spend the extra funding for sports and physical education, focusing on benefits for pupils in the long term. This is already showing a positive impact on the involvement of pupils in sport in a club run by a professional coach. Other money is to be spent on equipment and on coaches working alongside teachers in lessons, to enhance staff skills for the long term. A substantial investment is also to be made in the local school's partnership, enabling a variety of competitive sport.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors have greatly improved their systems to find out about the school's performance since the last inspection. They have a much better access to clear data about pupils' progress, and understand what this shows them. They also have a good overview of teaching in the school, using the new systems to manage teachers' performance introduced this year. Their good knowledge of the school has enabled governors to hold the school to account, but also to support the headteacher in introducing effective changes. Governors have spent funding well, particularly the pupil premium funding to help these pupils to achieve broadly the same progress as their classmates. Working with staff, they have ensured that safeguarding requirements are met.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117378
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	425257

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	464
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	the governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Julia Williamson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Gillian Seymour
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	07-08 February 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01707 880420
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