

# Skyswood Primary School

Chandlers Road, St Albans, AL4 9RS

**Inspection dates** 20–21 November 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Early years provision		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school.

- The headteacher and the leadership team, ably supported by an extremely effective and knowledgeable governing body, have been highly successful in bringing about improvements to the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Pupils are now making faster progress, particularly in the early years and in Key Stage 2. Rapid progress in Key Stage 2 means they reach high standards, particularly in mathematics, by the end of Year 6. Standards have improved in all subjects since the school's last inspection.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are welcoming, inquisitive, passionate about their learning, and proud to take on their responsibilities as prefects, play leaders and 'buddies' in earnest.
- Pupils say that they feel very safe and have great confidence in their teachers.
- The new curriculum involves and excites pupils and supports their excellent progress.
- The excellent work of the staff, together with rich and varied learning experiences, helps to ensure that children make outstanding progress in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- The school's work to develop all aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is exceptionally effective.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are well trained and dedicated to their work. They know pupils very well, ensure that learning is both interesting and exciting, and set exceptionally high expectations for all pupils.
- The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) is outstanding.
- All groups of pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1 and outstanding progress in Key Stage 2. This includes disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils.
- The vast majority of parents say that their children are happy at school, and are safe and well looked after. All say they would recommend the school to others.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 14 lessons, and talked to pupils about their progress and the work in their exercise books. Four of the visits to classrooms were undertaken jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. The inspectors also looked at samples of work from all key stages.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes were observed in lessons, assemblies, playtimes, when they moved around the school, during lunchtime, and at the beginning and end of the school day. They heard pupils from different age groups speak about their perceptions of the school.
- Pupils' work was scrutinised in literacy and mathematics, science, history and religious education.
- Meetings were held with members of staff, groups of pupils and governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. The lead inspector met with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors took into account the 114 responses to the online survey, Parent View, and parents' written comments, and held informal discussions with a random sample of parents.
- The inspectors considered the views expressed in the survey responses from 32 members of staff.
- Documents reviewed included the school's self-evaluation summary and improvement plan, arrangements for safeguarding, and records of observations of teaching, pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. In addition, inspectors considered notes from governors' meetings and the school's policies for supporting disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and those eligible for the pupil premium.

## Inspection team

Terrance Mortimer, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Gillian Scobie

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- Over three quarters of the pupils are White British and the others come from various minority ethnic backgrounds. Less than 10% of the pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the pupil premium provides support is nearly 6% and this is well below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is nearly 8%, which is below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- Children attend the nursery only in the morning. Those in Reception attend on a full-time basis.

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

- Raise attainment even further, especially in Key Stage 1 and in writing, by:
  - checking that pupils make the detailed improvements suggested by teachers when they mark their work
  - ensuring that pupils use the skills developed in writing lessons to improve the quality of their writing in other subjects.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher and senior leaders are unyielding in their pursuit of excellence and are of the opinion that only the best is good enough. They are well supported by very capable teachers and teaching assistants, and by a governing body that is both supportive and challenging.
- The quality of pupils' learning has improved since the previous inspection. Highly effective systems for monitoring the quality of teaching have enabled senior leaders to identify the instances where teaching has not been good enough. Decisive action taken by the headteacher in such cases has helped to ensure that teaching has improved too and is outstanding.
- Subject leaders, including the newly appointed ones, are well trained. They are fully involved in improving the quality of teaching and learning and play a crucial role in mentoring and coaching teachers who are new to the school. They ensure that teachers are supported in meeting their performance targets by regularly monitoring pupils' progress. Their strategies to improve standards in mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling were highly effective in boosting pupils' performance in 2014.
- The school's new curriculum is well on its way to being fully implemented. Pupils are very much aware that their learning has changed and are fully embracing it. Through themes, pupils explore a wide variety of topics ranging from the gunpowder plot in Year 1 to Mexico in Year 4 and Mary Seacole in Year 5. A local restaurant set up a wonderful experience for the children. The class visited the restaurant, were given a cultural talk that focused on both human and physical geography, and then got to sample a wide range of Mexican foods.
- All of the themes create plentiful opportunities for pupils to practise their reading, writing and mathematical skills, engage in creative musical and art-based activities and debate about issues of morality linked to, for example, historical and modern slavery. Teachers do not always make the most of these opportunities to develop pupils' writing skills.
- All aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are promoted exceptionally well. Pupils are very responsible and are skilled at debating ideas and working together, especially in the school council. They have excellent first-hand opportunities to meet religious leaders and visit various places of worship including churches, mosques and Hindu cultural temples. Such celebrations of cultural diversity help to ensure that pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school is committed to promoting equal opportunities for all. For instance, through excellent use of the pupil premium funding, the gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and others in the school have narrowed, especially in Key Stage 2.
- Leaders are as passionate about teachers' learning as they are about pupils' learning, and work exceptionally well within the local 'cluster' of schools to develop training opportunities for teachers. All staff who spoke to inspectors indicated that this has helped to improve their teaching.
- The school shares its expertise with the local authority in, for example, assessing the quality of pupils' writing. The local authority has also arranged helpful external support for the school, including a full review of teaching and learning, which has had a positive impact on improving teaching.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors gain a good knowledge of the quality of teaching and pupils' performance by asking searching questions, receiving regular reports from senior leaders, and coming into school to see for themselves. They have authorised staff training and know that it has been effective in helping the school to raise standards even further.
  - Governors receive detailed information on teachers' performance, and only reward teachers for their work if satisfied that they have met their demanding targets.
  - Governors know how well the pupil premium and primary school sport funding are used. For example, they know that working alongside professional coaches has strengthened teachers' practice and helped

to further develop the health and well-being of pupils.

- Governors' support for the school and knowledge about pupils' performance are exemplary. They work exceptionally well with all staff, and work closely with the school to ensure that it maintains high standards. Governors take care to ensure that the school's arrangements for safeguarding its pupils are effective and meet all related statutory requirements.

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

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. The school's over-riding supportive ethos forms the basis of a friendly atmosphere, in which relationships thrive.
- Pupils' attendance is high, and they love coming to school to learn with their friends. Their behaviour is exemplary at all times: in lessons, when at play, during lunch and when moving around inside the school. Their attitudes and approach to learning are outstanding.
- Pupils relish all the opportunities that they have to take on responsibilities. This was demonstrated in two assemblies where Year 6 pupils were proud to help Key Stage 1 pupils.
- Pupils enjoy their roles as 'Buddies', and are trained to help their younger peers resolve minor issues. As play leaders they are happy to ensure that no Key Stage 1 children are left alone during play time.
- Pupils are very welcoming and exceptionally eager to talk about and share their work. They are respectful towards each other and adults. They come to school neatly dressed and are proud to wear their various badges.

### **Safety**

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils are very much aware of how to keep themselves and others safe at all times, for example when learning outdoors, on trips and residential experiences. They are highly aware of how to keep safe in a variety of situations.
- Pupils are adamant that bullying rarely happens, if ever, and said that if it did that there would be serious consequences. The school's behaviour logs show that pupils break the rules very infrequently. The vast majority of parents say that bullying is rare, and always dealt with. Teachers are also of this opinion.
- Pupils have a very well developed understanding of prejudice-based bullying. Key Stage 2 pupils' understanding is extensive. Pupils are of the opinion that 'you should not judge people by the colour of their skin' and that no-one should be treated badly because they are different.
- Pupils' knowledge of how to stay safe while using the internet is excellent. They know to 'think before you click', never to give personal information out over the internet and to always seek advice if they are not sure about the safety of a website. They fully understand that cyber-bullying can take place on mobile phones, hand-held games, and anything that is connected to the internet.

## **The quality of teaching** is outstanding

- Inspectors' direct observations of teaching and pupils' work show that the teaching of literacy, including reading and writing, and mathematics is outstanding and fully caters for pupils' different capabilities. This high quality teaching is responsible for the outstanding progress made by all groups of pupils, and rapidly rising standards.
- Teachers show an in-depth knowledge and understanding of how to get the best out of all pupils. They set challenging tasks and activities which ensure that pupils are always engaged in their learning and consistently making good or outstanding progress.

- Pupils learn in lively, stimulating classrooms and are excited about their learning. Those who spoke to inspectors said that their new creative curriculum was both interesting and challenging. They said that they enjoyed the activities, including educational and residential visits at the start or end of new topics.
- Teachers' use of assessment information and other data is very good. Assessments are invariably accurate and are used carefully to group pupils and provide work that is adapted well for their different capabilities. Teachers are very aware of how different groups, including the most-able pupils, are learning in lessons, and adjust their practice to make sure that everyone does equally well.
- Very effective use of the high-quality teaching assistants has also had a very positive impact on pupils' achievement, particularly for those who find learning more difficult and disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium.
- Teachers show exceptionally high expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving and are highly skilled at setting them challenging activities. This was evident in a class where Year 2 pupils were engaged in a wide variety of tasks. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, made outstanding progress with their reading, writing and spelling activities because they were set at just the right level and teachers made their expectations crystal clear. The most able were challenged to 'segment and blend words', others happily read, while those who needed extra help with their reading were supported outstandingly well by teaching assistants.
- Work is marked regularly, and consistently in line with the school policy. In English and mathematics this gives pupils clear and constructive suggestions for improving their work. Pupils are beginning to get better at responding to the marking and this is having a positive impact on their progress. However, the marking in areas such as topic work and history is less effective and does not always clarify how pupils can use their literacy skills to improve their work.

### The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Children enter the Nursery with a wide range of skills in different areas of learning. They make outstanding progress in the early years, and most reach a good level of development by the time they join Year 1.
- Standards in the national tests at the end of Year 2 have risen over recent years to broadly average levels in reading, writing, and mathematics, though not as fast in writing. This achievement represents a significant improvement since the previous inspection.
- Pupils' progress accelerates in Key Stage 2 and they make rapid progress through the key stage. By the end of Year 6, pupils reach standards that are above average overall and particularly in mathematics and reading. For the last three years the measure showing how much value the school has added to pupils' learning has been significantly above the national average. Progress in writing, while good, is not quite as rapid as in other subjects. The school has taken decisive action to provide extra support work to make sure that pupils rapidly make up any lost ground.
- The results of the 2014 Year 1 check on pupils' phonic skills were well above average. This represents outstanding progress given pupils' starting points. It also reflects the excellent teaching of this aspect of literacy, which is the result of the new system for teaching phonics now used across the school and the additional training undertaken by teachers and teaching assistants.
- In 2014, above-average proportions of pupils made and exceeded nationally expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress in reading, writing and mathematics continues to accelerate throughout the school and especially in Key Stage 1. There is also evidence of strong achievement in other subjects such as physical education, science and history.
- Throughout the school the most-able pupils, and the small number from minority ethnic backgrounds, make very good progress. In 2014, the proportion making more than expected progress in reading, and mathematics, by the end of Year 6, was well above average, although not so high in writing. Last year, these pupils in all years made similar or better progress than their classmates.

- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make equally strong progress because of the extra help they receive. Last year's results showed that these pupils had made at least as much progress as their peers, and sometimes more.
- Extra support is provided for the very small number of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding where it is needed. The group is too small to be able to comment on their standards at the end of Year 6 without risk of highlighting individuals. However, the school's information for 2014 shows that attainment gaps between eligible pupils and other groups closed across all years. They typically make very good progress.

### **The early years provision**

**is outstanding**

- Children make outstanding progress and are very well prepared for entry to Year 1. High proportions achieve a good level of development, particularly in their personal, social and emotional qualities, and in communication and mathematical skills.
- The school makes sure that children settle quickly when they first join the Nursery or Reception classes. Parental visits to school, as well as staff visits to children's homes, help to provide a detailed picture of each child's abilities and interests.
- All staff plan opportunities and experiences that draw carefully on children's interests. As a consequence, almost all children are immersed in the daily activities. They happily play and learn indoors and out, with a wider range of resources at hand than at the time of the previous inspection. They take turns when role-playing patiently with one another, showing excellent behaviour and attitudes to learning.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Adults constantly ask questions, while at the same time noting the children's emerging strengths and areas for further development. In such a way, they plan additional and supplementary activities and resources to motivate and engage all learners.
- Daily communication with parents is highly effective. Information about what is happening in school each week is found in the children's bespoke 'learning journey' folders, accessible to all parents. As a result, parents make a valuable contribution to their children's learning at home, supporting carefully their progress.
- The early years provision is led and managed very well by knowledgeable and creative members of staff. Excellent teamwork ensures that all children are well cared for and safe.

## 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>	117240
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	448500

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>	243
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Catherine Borel-Saladin
<b>Headteacher</b>	Robert Bridle
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 October 2009
<b>Telephone number</b>	01727 854164
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