

River Bank Primary School

Bath Road, Luton, LU3 1ES

Inspection dates 7–8 July 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Requires improvement 3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement 3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement 3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement 3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement 3
Early years provision		Requires improvement 3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Standards are not high enough. Achievement at the end of the early years is below that expected in reading, writing and some aspects of number. At the end of Year 1, standards achieved by almost half of the pupils in writing are below those expected for their age.
- The quality of teaching varies too widely. Changes in staffing and a lack of focused monitoring mean that staff have not received sufficient support to improve their work. Learning opportunities are not always well matched to pupils' needs.
- Provision in the early years requires improvement. The lack of detail in some teachers' assessments means that some of the youngest children are not well enough supported to quickly develop key skills.
- Pupils do not develop good work habits. In the early years, some children move too quickly between different activities without fully engaging in them. As a result, they do not develop concentration and resilience as learners.
- Some of the early years teaching in large groups is not managed well enough. As a result, children lose interest and misconceptions are not addressed.
- Leaders have not given enough attention to ensuring that systems for assessing pupils' progress are robust and accurate. As a result, some pupils have not been well enough supported to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Until recently, governors have not had the detailed information necessary to know how well the school is performing. As a result, they have not rigorously challenged leaders to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher has introduced good quality systems for monitoring and analysing the work of the school. As a result, teachers understand how well pupils are doing and are planning work that is better matched to their needs.
- Governors have implemented more rigorous recording systems and now have the information necessary to analyse the school's work effectively.
- Actions have been taken to ensure procedures are robust and that children are safe.
- Teaching in Year 1 is improving because the support pupils are now receiving is effective. As a result, they are making better progress in developing fluency in their writing and in improving their mathematical reasoning skills.
- Pupils feel safe, and they are polite and courteous. They say they enjoy the range of sporting activities and appreciate the specialist teaching they receive.
- Children in the early years enjoy the range of activities available to them.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching in nine lessons. These observations were undertaken jointly with the headteacher. Some observations took place when all of the children in Reception were working together across two classrooms and the shared area. During these observations, the inspector looked at children's work and spoke to them about their learning.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documents including school improvement planning, self-evaluation, assessment and tracking information, records of pupils' attendance and behaviour, those relating to safeguarding and the reviews undertaken by the external consultant headteacher.
- Meetings were held with pupils, school leaders, governors and staff. The inspector heard pupils read and spoke to them about their learning and the books they enjoy.
- The inspector took account of the school's own survey of parents' views, and of the 19 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. She also met with two groups of parents.

Inspection team

Prue Rayner, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- River Bank Primary School is an academy free school; it opened in September 2013 and is sponsored by 'Active Luton' who established the Active Education Trust through which it operates.
- During its first year, the school was led by a part-time headteacher. In February 2015, the new headteacher was appointed, initially in an interim role. She now holds the permanent full-time position.
- There are currently 140 pupils on roll, 80 in the Reception classes and 60 in Year 1. The school will continue to grow over the next five years to reach its full capacity when it will eventually provide primary education through to Year 6.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils who are eligible for free school meals, looked after by the local authority or from service families) provides support is broadly in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are from minority ethnic heritages is well above the national average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language. The highest proportion of these pupils is of Asian heritage. Leaders are currently working to establish a more accurate understanding of pupils' ethnicity because systems in place do not provide this in sufficient detail.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is broadly average.
- The early years provides full-time education for children in their first year at school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring teachers' assessments of pupils' work are accurate, undertaken frequently and that they use the information gathered to plan lessons that meet the range of pupils' abilities
 - providing pupils with more suitable activities that develop positive work habits, such as concentration, independence and resilience
 - further developing the guidance given to teachers on how to improve their work and following this up quickly to ensure changes have been made and improvement is sustained.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - implementing a rigorous plan for the induction of the new leaders in September which makes expectations clear and monitors regularly how well these are achieved
 - ensuring the improvement plan for the next academic year identifies clearly leaders' responsibilities and expectations for success and specifies procedures for monitoring these by leaders and governors
 - ensuring parents are kept fully informed about the changes that happen as the school increases in size.
- Improve the quality of provision in the early years by:
 - ensuring that if children are taught in large groups their learning is well managed
 - implementing planning that makes clear for each activity, both indoors and outside, the expected learning children will experience
 - providing more opportunities for children, particularly boys, to use their emerging writing skills in fun and interesting ways
 - ensuring the systems for assessing children's progress work efficiently and are fit for purpose
 - improving assessment so that staff know how well children are developing key skills and support them effectively to make the next steps in learning
 - tracking the activities children participate in so that analysis of their learning is accurate and they are encouraged to develop concentration and resilience in their learning.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Governors and the previous headteacher established a strong vision for the school based on Olympic values, healthy lifestyles and access to a wide range of sporting opportunities underpinning effective learning. Insufficient attention to establishing rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures during the early life of the school, however, meant that governors did not have the essential information about key aspects of the school's work necessary to enable them to effectively challenge and support leaders to realise this vision.
- The new headteacher has quickly remedied this. Arrangements for managing staff performance have been made more rigorous, assessment has been put in place in the Year 1 classes and additional support sought to improve attendance, raise the quality of teaching and to evaluate key aspects of the school's work, including safeguarding procedures. As a result, leaders and governors now understand the school's strengths and its weaknesses and are taking action to address the aspects that need development.
- The improved assessment and tracking of pupils' achievement, which is in place in Year 1, is enabling leaders to analyse the progress of individuals and different groups of pupils in detail. This includes reviewing the use of the pupil premium to ensure it is supporting disadvantaged pupils to make the progress they are capable of. As a result of these changes, leaders and governors are better able to understand how well the resources available to them are directly improving pupils' progress. This is helping them to ensure pupils receive equal opportunities and are not subject to any discrimination.
- School improvement planning is insufficiently detailed; there is a lack of clarity about how the most important priorities will be addressed and how actions and their impact will be monitored. This is currently under review by the headteacher and governors, and they are ensuring that appropriate new objectives are being identified to manage the expansion of the school in September.
- The school's small size has meant that leaders have had to hold a range of responsibilities, sometimes temporarily, and aspects of leadership are underdeveloped, for example, the leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and that of core subjects like English and mathematics. New appointments have been made for September to bring increased expertise and capacity for improvement. Job descriptions in place for these roles reflect the rigorous expectations of the new headteacher.
- A number of parents spoken to shared their delight at the establishment of the school and expressed their appreciation for its work; they say their children are happy and feel safe at school. Others, however, are concerned about the significant changes in leadership at this early stage, which they feel have not been communicated well, and are seeking reassurance that the commitment to the initial vision will be sustained.
- Improvements in pupils' work in Year 1 reflect the effective actions taken to support the development of the quality of teaching. Staff have responded positively to the additional advice and support they have received from an advanced skills teacher. The new headteacher has established a comprehensive analysis of the quality of teaching, and is effectively targeting support and raising expectations of pupils' achievement and learning behaviour.
- Expectations of pupils' behaviour are shared by all staff and are managed consistently well. However, the significant amount of changes to leadership and staffing that have occurred quite quickly mean there is not yet an embedded ethos within which high aspirations and positive staff relationships are flourishing.
- Pupils in Year 1 are taught a range of subjects including science, religious education, geography and history. They say they particularly enjoy the specialist music and physical education lessons and are enthusiastic about the additional sporting opportunities they are offered including gym club. The extra funding received to improve physical education and sport has ensured that pupils receive at least two hours of high quality tuition each week. It has also enabled the purchase of high quality gymnastics equipment which is being used to extend pupils' skills.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is being developed well. Pupils' work shows they learn

about a range of religions and cultures. They said they enjoy this aspect of their learning and parents also said they are pleased their children learn about diversity. Governors and leaders understand the risks pupils are exposed to in the wider community, and staff have received specific training to help them understand those related to radicalisation. Although young, these aspects of pupils' education and the Olympic values they are taught are helping them to understand how to be tolerant and respectful of others. In a Year 1 mathematics lesson, a teacher helped a pupil manage giving feedback to a classmate about a wrong answer to a problem in a helpful rather than a critical manner.

- The headteacher has made good use of the support of external consultants to audit and address safeguarding procedures, to analyse achievement and to support improvements to the quality of teaching in Year 1. Feedback from visits has been acted on quickly and decisively.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors have used their links with 'Active Luton' to drive the establishment of a school with healthy, active lifestyles as core elements of provision. The well-considered, extensive school facilities reflect the high aspirations established for pupils and the wider community to experience a wide range of good quality sporting activities. This vision is already becoming evident as the local use of facilities increases and strong expertise in sporting tuition is established as a key aspect of provision for pupils.
- Staff recruitment to this new school has been challenging; nevertheless, governors have been determined to set up and develop a staff team with the appropriate expertise and drive to achieve their vision of excellence. They have carefully managed the change in leadership and striven to ensure leadership is robust. Working with the new headteacher, they have put appropriate staffing in place for September and have established more effective strategies to support the continuing growth of the school.
- Although governors have met with parents to explain some of the changes happening, there is still a sense of uncertainty because significant leadership changes have happened so early in the life of the school. Because of the way changes to leadership have been communicated, some parents feel they have not been kept sufficiently informed of how well changes will match the vision established when the school was set up.
- Governors bring a wealth of experience and expertise to their roles and have audited their skills to ensure they are used to best effect. The information they are now receiving from the headteacher about key elements of the school's work is enabling them to understand in appropriate detail the quality of teaching and how well it is supporting pupils' achievement. This includes more detailed analysis of how the pupil premium is spent to support disadvantaged pupils. As a result, there is greater rigour in their work and their support is providing more direction. In recognition of the need to tighten up their work, they have employed an experienced clerk so that records of their meetings reflect fully the challenge and direction they are giving to the work of the school.
- Governors have visited to observe the school's work in physical education and music, they have scrutinised curriculum planning and pupils' work to corroborate the leaders' judgements shared with them. Visits have also been focused on ensuring statutory health and safety requirements are met and that safeguarding procedures are appropriate.
- Governors now receive more detailed information about staff performance; appropriate procedures are in place to review this regularly and to ensure that any increases in pay are linked to how well pupils are achieving.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- Behaviour requires improvement because pupils have not been given the support they need to develop the use of key learning skills well enough. As a result, they do not develop good learning habits; they do not show independence in completing their work, or enough resilience and determination to tackle more complex and demanding tasks as their learning progresses.
- Pupils are polite and courteous; they are respectful to visitors and move around the school calmly. They talk about their school with pride and enthusiasm and cheerfully undertake the assignments that are set for them. Staff use the behaviour management processes effectively. As a result, pupils know what is expected of them and they say that achieving 'super star' status for their behaviour is very important.

- Pupils' attendance is improving because procedures introduced to monitor their attendance and to take action where it is poor are starting to have an effect. The school's family worker has provided support and challenge to parents whose children do not attend school regularly; this is now also addressed through work with the local authority welfare officer. Current attendance figures are just below the national average.
- Incidents of poor behaviour are recorded in appropriate detail and pupils are supported to understand when their actions are inappropriate through being encouraged to 'make the right choices'. There is no overall analysis of behaviour or use of this information yet to understand the triggers for poor behaviour which would allow staff to prevent its reoccurrence.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Leaders have ensured that appropriate child protection training has been undertaken by staff. Vulnerable pupils are identified and there is good evidence of wider engagement with other services where it is needed to protect pupils and to support their families.
- Pupils talk enthusiastically about their information and communication technology lessons in which they have learnt how to use computers safely and to be careful when using the internet. They also demonstrate good understanding of the risks they face when they go on school trips and are confident they know what to do should a fire occur in school.
- Pupils also show a well-developed understanding of what bullying is and of the different forms it can take. They said, 'It's something that happens over again that makes you feel unhappy or hurts you'. They say they are confident that staff would take necessary action to manage any misbehaviour or unkindness.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching varies too widely. Teaching in the early years differed significantly on the two days of the inspection and the progress children make reflects this. Sometimes, the guidance given to children about their learning is very specifically focused so they make good progress. At other times, assessment information is not used well enough to ensure children are effectively supported to develop their key skills or to move on in their learning.
- In some instances, the teaching groups in the Reception class are too large to maintain all the children's interest or to allow staff to check the accuracy of their responses. As a result, misconceptions go unchecked and some children lose interest in their learning. Where groups are of a manageable size, children contribute enthusiastically and make rapid progress in their learning.
- In Year 1, there is good evidence that teaching is improving. Increasingly high expectations of pupils are reflected in the quality of their work and their attitudes to learning. Where teaching is best, pupils make the most progress in lessons, teachers' probing questions check their understanding and challenge them to think further. Pupils are effectively encouraged to use what they already know along with the new ideas their teachers share to solve problems and develop their knowledge.
- At Key Stage 1, teachers have improved their assessment of pupils' learning and are using this to plan lessons which extend their thinking. Where this is best, work is well matched to pupils' needs, and effective management of behaviour ensures all pupils remain on task and work hard. In some instances, teaching is less well planned so does not demand enough of pupils or provide them with enough new learning to challenge them sufficiently to make good progress.
- In Year 1, teachers carefully plan work to develop pupils' reading, writing and number skills. Pupils are increasingly being challenged to think deeply and to develop the skills they need to make good progress in Year 2. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils used their ability to reason to decide criteria by which they could sort numbers and then sorted them against four different possibilities. The level of interest was high and pupils willingly helped each other to solve the problems presented by the task.

- In Year 1, teaching assistants work with teachers well to understand what the pupils they are working with need to learn. They use good questioning which keeps pupils interested and thinking about their learning. This ensures that pupils take the next steps in their learning quickly. In a mathematics lesson, the carefully planned support for newly arrived pupils, who speak little English, effectively enabled them to undertake similar activities to their classmates while also learning essential English vocabulary.

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- The school's assessments of children's attainment on entry suggest that many start with skills and abilities that are below those typical for their age. In particular, more children have lower early reading, writing and number skills than they have in speaking, listening, understanding language and other areas of their attainment. Outcomes at the end of the Reception Year in 2014 and in 2015 show that this picture continues to be the case. This is because the assessment and tracking systems do not identify the very specific aspects of reading and writing skills that individual children need to improve and so these are not addressed quickly enough.
- In 2014, boys' attainment at the end of Reception was low, and below that of girls, particularly in being imaginative, reading, writing and shape, space and measures. Their attainment was in line with the national average in areas such as physical development, listening, speaking, personal, social and emotional development. This year, girls' attainment is again above that of boys, however, the gaps are narrower. Overall attainment remains below last year's national standards, and literacy and mathematics outcomes are lower than those attained by children at the school in 2014.
- Changes in staffing and a number of children joining the Reception class during the year have had some impact on depressing the overall attainment of children in the Reception Year. However, it is also clear that not enough attention has been given to assessing, tracking and teaching children some essential basic skills. The work of adults has not been well enough focused on carefully helping children to master key elements of their learning such as pencil grip and letter formation.
- Pupils' work in Year 1 shows they have started to make better progress because assessment is being used by teachers more accurately and more often to plan effectively to meet the range of pupils' needs. Although their work demonstrates this increasing progress, there is still some way to go for them to catch up with age-related expectations. Assessment information compiled by the new headteacher shows that almost half the year group are working below age-related expectations in writing. Too few pupils are on track to achieve the higher levels of attainment reached nationally in writing at the end of Year 2. The pattern is similar but there are narrower gaps between pupils' attainment and national standards in reading and mathematics.
- Procedures for monitoring the progress of different groups of pupils have only recently been established. Assessment information currently shows that pupils eligible for the pupil premium make similar to or better progress than their classmates in school. Those identified as having special educational needs make expected progress from their starting points.
- Pupils develop a good understanding of the sounds that letters make individually and when they are grouped together. They use the correct vocabulary to describe the different combinations. In Year 1, pupils confidently use terms like 'split vowel digraph' to describe how words are spelt. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening assessment at the end of Year 1 this year is slightly below the national average. Pupils use this knowledge effectively in their writing. Pupils who read to the inspector showed good understanding of their books and used letter sounds to spell unfamiliar words well. In some instances, they relied too heavily on using these skills rather than reading simple words they could recognise without sounding them out. This slowed the fluency of their reading.

The early years provision requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and children's achievement require improvement. Teachers' planning does not identify in sufficient detail the key skills children are expected to learn when they engage in the wide range of activities available to them. This means that adults who work with children do not help them learn and develop key skills thoroughly enough. In some of the outdoor and indoor practical activities, the lack of detail in planning means that adults do not question or support children well enough to enable them to make the intended steps in their learning quickly.
- The size of groups that children work in when they are taught new skills like sharing numbers and phonics varies. Where groups are small and adults monitor their responses carefully, children are helped to learn well and any misunderstandings are corrected. Sometimes, these groups are too large for adults to identify when children are making mistakes, not concentrating, or not keeping up with new learning. As a result, some children lose interest and do not develop strong learning behaviour.
- Staff have a good understanding of children's interests and use this knowledge to promote their learning; children enjoy the range of activities put out for them every day. They work and play together happily because they understand the strategies staff use to manage their behaviour and want to be 'super stars'. In some of the activities, they are encouraged to experiment and to try out new ideas, for example, building boats for the gingerbread man to cross the river in and then testing them to see if they float or sink. There are not, however, enough opportunities that engage children in using their writing skills in different contexts and in interesting ways.
- Leadership of the early years requires improvement because although the leader used her knowledge effectively to develop provision initially, the changes in staffing and increase in numbers of children have not been managed well enough to ensure that children's learning needs are met equally well in all the learning sessions, particularly those that take place when she is not present.
- The early years team works together collaboratively and meets to discuss children's achievements on a daily basis. However, problems with accessing the computerised programme used to monitor assessment mean that it has not been used well enough to record children's learning as they engage in the planned activities. There are some paper-based systems but these have not been regularly updated, and have not been used when the computerised systems have failed. As a result, on some occasions, the necessary information is not readily available to ensure staff support children's learning effectively.
- Staff establish early relationships with children's families through home visits undertaken before children start school. Parents appreciate that staff are available and like the 'open door' policy which means they can share information and concerns about their children regularly and easily. More formal procedures to encourage parents to share their views about aspects of their children's learning through the computerised assessment systems are limited because of difficulties in accessing them.
- Arrangements to keep children safe are effective, they are well supervised and staff have the appropriate training in child protection and first aid procedures.

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	139782
Local authority	Luton
Inspection number	450156

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	140
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Williets
Headteacher	Sally Reay
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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