

Mesty Croft Academy

St Luke's Road, Wednesbury, Sandwell WS10 0QY

Inspection dates

9–10 December 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- There is not enough good teaching of younger pupils (early years and Key Stage 1).
- In some lessons, teachers do not act upon their assessment of pupils' progress quickly enough to sustain good progress.
- Younger pupils' writing achievement lags behind their reading and writing.
- The quality of provision by teachers other than the main classroom practitioner is inconsistent.
- The assessment of children's learning in early years does not inform lesson planning quickly enough to avoid attainment gaps developing.
- Some younger pupils are not sure what the schools' marking policy means.
- A sustainable long-term strategic partnership with another school or group of schools is not secure.

The school has the following strengths

- Good leadership has led to effective performance management for class teachers and a substantial improvement in teaching quality since the previous inspection.
- Changes to the way governors are led and organised has driven good-quality challenge and support for school leaders.
- The gap between disadvantaged pupils and others in Key Stage 1 has closed significantly.
- Disadvantaged pupils in Key Stage 2 make much better progress from their starting points than similar pupils nationally. Other Key Stage 2 pupils also exceed expected progress benchmarks.
- Effective teacher training led by a teaching school alliance has contributed to better teaching and better leadership.
- There is good teaching, good learning and good pupil outcomes throughout Key Stage 2.
- The curriculum is interesting, varied and uses a rich range of events and activities to support pupil learning and personal development.
- Pupils behave well, enjoy learning, attend school regularly, are taught how to stay safe and are well cared for by all school staff.
- Pupils know the importance of tolerance, fairness, and respect. They show great empathy for pupils who are experiencing troubled moments.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Maintain the current collaborative links with the supporting teaching school while seeking a permanent partnership arrangement.
- Apply the effective quality assurance of teaching processes to all taught lessons, not just those of the main classroom teacher.
- Improve the quality of teaching at Key Stage 1 and in the early years by sharing the best practice already evident in these phases and across Key Stage 2.
- Make sure all teachers, including temporary staff or those regularly taking one or two lessons under the direction of the main class teacher, review pupil learning consistently as the lesson proceeds and then adjust their teaching as a result of the information received.
- Ensure that pupils have enough time to review and understand their learning before requiring them to develop it further.
- Make sure younger pupils understand the marking policy and what they should do to improve by way of response.
- Improve the quality of assessment in early years so that children's progress can be monitored effectively and any necessary adjustments provided in a timely fashion.
- Raise the standard of pupils' writing in Key Stage 1, and early years by
 - clear modelling of high-quality writing by teachers
 - improved reading resources designed to support higher-quality writing
 - more frequent, more challenging writing tasks for pupils
 - higher expectations for handwriting fluency and neatness across the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- School leaders have tackled methodically the weaknesses in teaching identified at the previous inspection by establishing clear expectations of staff, alongside regular monitoring of teaching quality. Manor Primary School (a teaching school) leads effective staff training and development that has helped to improve day-to-day teaching. Inadequate teaching has been eliminated.
- Manor Primary School has supported the effective middle leadership training programme. It has allowed these staff to take more responsibility for their subjects and key stages. These leaders relish the opportunity to help improve their school.
- As the expectations of school leaders for better-quality teaching have risen, some staff have left the school. The ongoing changeover of staff presents further opportunities for improvement. New leadership in the early years is leading to better teaching here, especially in Nursery. There are new outdoor learning facilities, reorganised classroom spaces giving a sense of space and lack of clutter, and a clear plan to improve writing outcomes, starting in early years.
- Leaders have assessed accurately the starting points of children as they join nursery. These are marginally below age-related expectations overall. This allows teachers to plan appropriate activities to develop children's learning as they arrive in school, and to measure their progress throughout the year.
- The new chair of governors requested a review of the learning environment across the school, leading to corridors and classrooms that are brighter and have much more pupil work on show. Pupils try hard to present their work well and are proud to see it used as a good example.
- The school curriculum is broad and balanced and much more interesting for pupils, compared with that at the previous inspection. A good mix of visitors and visits is used to build incrementally pupils' social and cultural understanding. This is coupled with carefully planned assemblies and topics that enhance spiritual and moral development. Together, these features ensure that pupils develop a good understanding of fundamental British values. For example, pupils are particularly good at recognising when their peers are unhappy, show good empathy and make sure that teachers and other staff become aware.
- The school promotes equality of opportunity for its pupils well, providing the necessary support for any group of pupils who would otherwise find engaging with school learning difficult. That inclusive ethos is exemplified in the 'Mesty Croft Tapestry', depicting the achievements of all groups of pupils.
- Clear monitoring of the pupil premium funding identifies what has worked well and where it has not yet had enough impact. The most effective work is helping to raise attainment at Key Stage 2, but further improvement needs to be focused on the younger classes, linked to the need for better early development of speaking in early Years and subsequently better writing skills at Key Stage 1. This has been identified clearly by school leaders.
- The sports premium is used to employ a sports coach, who also works as a learning mentor with a few pupils in their academic lessons. Sport is a popular part of the curriculum as a result, and there are a range of additional after school clubs with high levels of pupil participation. Sports skills development for pupils is monitored in detail over time and demonstrates improvement. The school is very successful in local area sporting competitions.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - is good as a result of the swift reorganisation of the governing body by the new chair of governors when he took up the position in the summer of 2015
 - recognises the need to secure a sustainable partnership with another school to ensure long-term external support and critical evaluation of the school's performance
 - gives clear roles and responsibilities to every member so they monitor collectively every aspect of school performance
 - has benefited from good training by Manor Primary School
 - includes weekly meetings between the chair and senior leadership team that inject further a sense of urgency in resolving remaining weaknesses
 - operates a complaints policy effectively to resolve concerns, in most cases to the satisfaction of the complainant.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Governors make sure staff are fully trained in the necessary procedures including the 'Prevent' strategy to tackle extremism and radicalisation. Staff are alert to any signs that might indicate a pupil is at risk, including concerns around appropriate parental

control of electronic media. The liaison with other agencies works well to support pupils and families needing specialist resources.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Teaching is no longer inadequate, in any year group, but in the early Years and Key Stage 1, it still requires further improvement. In some lessons, teachers are not matching work consistently to pupils' prior learning, sometimes repeating work that does not stretch or challenge them which then leaves some pupils unable to make effective progress. Sometimes, pupils cannot complete an activity in enough depth to make real gains in their understanding before being moved onto the next activity.
- The development of writing is still not good enough in Early Years and Key Stage 1. Where improvements are required, pupils wait too long before starting to write for themselves. Handwriting can be poor lower down the school but does improve quickly in Key Stage 2, partly because teachers are better at motivating pupils by using interesting subjects or events as a relevant purpose for writing.
- The amount of high-quality writing pupils are asked to do, particularly earlier in the school, is not enough to tackle the weaknesses in writing in some classes. Improvements in writing are sometimes hampered by the lack of good modelling of what is expected, and also missed opportunities to use pupils' reading texts as examples of good writing.
- There is consistently good teaching and learning in Key Stage 2. Teachers have been able to recover some of the underachievement in earlier years by using the schools' good 'challenge' model of lesson planning consistently. In this, pupils have some choice as to what level of challenge they attempt, supervised by the teacher. This encourages pupils to tackle a task with a degree of difficulty that is just hard enough to require some challenge, but still achievable and therefore becomes motivating when they achieve success.
- Where teaching is good, teachers adapt their teaching as the lesson proceeds, using their skilled ongoing assessment of pupils progress. Crucially, they let pupils finish the task properly, even if that means running over time. They also ask pupils questions that provoke full sentences in response, and do not accept the first 'correct' answer before checking that other pupils agree.
- Inspectors observed some weaker practice in lessons not being taken by the main class teacher. School leaders are not consistently monitoring the quality of this teaching.
- In most lessons there is no hiding place for reluctant learners. Teachers use good humour to encourage pupils' best effort. They exploit special events, for example a recent visit to the national space centre at Leicester, or a Chinese visitor wearing traditional costume, to provide tangible and relevant inspiration for writing, science, cultural development and mathematics work. Pupils very much enjoy these events. They particularly like writing as they get older. They say, 'We can use our imagination when we write.'
- Teachers use homework well to promote better reading, writing and numeracy, using set books for every pupil to complete over the term. Pupils have planners to record this. The school is full of 'project' models and artwork completed at home, indicating considerable commitment by pupils and their parents and carers alike. This is one aspect of good-quality homework that is enjoyed by pupils, although they see it as topic work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupil's personal development and welfare is good.
- School staff and governors work well together to ensure that pupils are well looked after. Pupils are effectively taught how to keep themselves safe, including online. Older pupils are aware of a risk of involvement with unsuitable people through social media, and all know how to report any unwelcome approach.
- The risks of radicalisation are taught to pupils, who know how they can report anything that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Pupils are taught well about bullying and how they can help tackle it; they know it happens occasionally but they also know the school deals effectively with it. That also includes a strong response by teachers to any racist or homophobic language. A very few parents of the small number who responded to Parent View do not agree. Inspectors found no cause for concern in the way school staff manage incidents where pupils come into conflict.

- Inspectors took note of the school's recent survey of pupils, which found many strengths, including the interesting topics they study and the help they get from teachers. It also shows that some pupils have some concerns about bullying. They would like a stronger school council, and don't like homework or assessments; they are not alone among pupils of all generations in that respect!
- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school, as indicated by attendance which is in line with national figures, despite a major chickenpox outbreak last year. Those few pupils with persistently low attendance are known well by the school, and the reasons are linked with long-term medical conditions. There are no significant variations between the attendance of different groups of pupils. There are effective links with other agencies in support of pupils whose situations make them vulnerable to poor attendance.
- Behaviour in lessons is almost always good, especially where pupils are closely involved in choosing their 'challenge' task. They are honest in assessing their own learning, and this leads to rapid progress as they move quickly onto new work. Low-level disruption is rare and when it takes place is always linked to weaker teaching, where pupils have lost interest or find the work too easy.
- Behaviour around the school is calm, friendly and ordered. The school has clear rules, which everybody knows and respects, and pupils think these rules are fair. Breaktimes are energetic and good fun for pupils, with plenty of apparatus available for them to exercise vigorously.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Pupils begin Key Stage 1 with broadly typical starting points, and make steady progress to complete it with broadly average academic standards overall. Writing lags behind reading and mathematics by about a term. By the end of Key Stage 1 in 2015, disadvantaged pupils were half a term behind their non-disadvantaged peers; four years ago this was two terms. Compared with national figures, there are relatively low proportions of pupils achieving the highest levels. Work by current pupils shows a broadly similar picture of reasonable progress, but this varies between each class, depending on teaching quality.
- These standards are, nevertheless, significantly higher than in previous years and are evidence of better teaching than at the previous inspection and of the school's capacity for sustained improvement. All pupils passed the national phonics test (letters and the sounds they make) by the end of Year 2.
- In 2015, Year 6 pupils attained the schools' best ever result in national tests, with just above average standards overall. There was no gap between writing and reading, and mathematics is even better. Given that the attainment of those pupils was well below average when they started Key Stage 2, this shows good progress. Classwork by current Key Stage 2 pupils shows even better outcomes, particularly in Years 3 and 4, indicating continued good work to resolve the weaker Key Stage 1 results.
- The gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils remained high at 2015 for Year 6 pupils, at about two terms. Disadvantaged pupils attain the same outcomes as similar pupils nationally; the gap arises because non-disadvantaged pupils attain much higher outcomes than similar pupils nationally. Both groups are exceeding the expected progress benchmarks in Key Stage 2, because of good teaching, with disadvantaged pupils making much better progress than similar pupils nationally from their starting points, in all subjects. There are no other significant gaps between different groups of learners, which are consistent with the school's approach to ensuring equality of outcomes for all its pupils. Pupils are adequately prepared for secondary school academically and socially.
- Inspection evidence confirms that the current Key Stage 2 pupils are making good progress since the start of the autumn term, in almost every class.
- In all key stages, most disabled pupils and those pupils with special educational needs keep pace with their peers. This is as a result of better planning for their learning needs lesson by lesson, leading to fewer instances where these pupils leave the lesson at the start for separate work outside the classroom. The impact of this is more apparent in Key Stage 2 at present.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- The early years provision is undergoing substantial changes to staff and the physical environment to tackle historically weak progress made by children. A new leader started work this term, but has stepped in to cover long-term illness in nursery. As yet, leaders have not secured good or better teaching. There is a clear plan to do this, including training and support for teachers and tightening assessment practice.

The improved learning environments make it clear to children, and their parents and carers, that school leaders are serious about enriching and enhancing provision in every way possible.

- Aspects of teaching that require improvement include some phonics subject knowledge, as well as increasing the challenge for pupils. There are currently too few opportunities to develop writing, including the quality of handwriting. Letter formation is not yet being developed effectively enough.
- The assessment of children's learning, or at least its recording, is not yet systematic enough to inform lesson planning which will prevent gaps developing in pupils learning quickly enough. This becomes most evident when looking at the better progress made by more-able children in writing, compared with less-able children. The support for disadvantaged children has not yet managed to stop this gap widening.
- Children start nursery with levels that are slightly below expected levels, and reach expected levels by the end of the key stage. Better progress is evident in nursery than in reception currently.
- There are good relationships with parents and carers. They are part of the assessment process. Leaders take account of feeder settings' own assessment.
- Children behave well overall. They are safe and well cared for, benefiting from secure and warm relationships with staff.
- Where teaching requires improvement, some children are not always fully engaged in their learning because the activities lack motivating challenge or interest.

School details

Unique reference number	137972
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	10005227

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	428
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Babb
Headteacher	Andrew Kirby
Telephone number	0121 556 0854
Website	www.mestycroftacademy.co.uk/
Email address	enquiry@mestycroft.sandwell.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 June 2014

Information about this school

- The school is larger than most primary schools.
- The school runs an on-site breakfast club every morning.
- The proportions of pupils eligible for the pupil premium, the proportion with disabilities and those with special educational needs, the proportion from minority heritage backgrounds and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are broadly average.
- The school is supported by a national leader of education from Manor Primary School.
- The school met the government floor standards in 2014 and 2015.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed all teachers in attendance during the inspection, visiting 16 lessons for more than 30 minutes, and dropping into other classes for shorter observations to gain an overall picture of teaching. Some of these observations took place jointly with school senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' written work, heard pupils read and looked at school and national information on pupil attainment and progress.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers, parents and pupils. They also met with governors and the headteacher of the Manor Primary School and a consultant to the governing body.
- Inspectors reviewed notes of governing body meetings, the school's self-evaluation report and school improvement plans.
- Inspectors took account of 15 responses to Parent View, and 25 responses to Ofsted's confidential staff questionnaire. Inspectors also spoke with 10 parents.

Inspection team

Brian Cartwright, lead inspector
Jonathan Moore

Her Majesty's Inspector
Ofsted Inspector

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