

Alexandra Junior School

Meir Road, Normacot, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST3 7JG

Inspection dates

31 January–1 February 2017

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- In 2016, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard by the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics was low.
- In the past, there have been differences in the rates of progress of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally. The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been lower than that of other pupils at the school.
- Although the outcomes of the most able pupils are now better than in the past, they remain lower than for pupils with similar starting points nationally.
- In lessons, some pupils are not encouraged to move on quickly when ready, and for others tasks are pitched at the wrong level.
- Teachers do not place sufficient emphasis on developing pupils' resilience and concentration. As a result, there is an over-reliance on adults for help and some off-task behaviour.
- Middle leaders are new in post and still developing the skills to fulfil their areas of responsibility.
- Pupils' attendance is below average.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and governors have acted decisively and quickly to address declining standards. Their effective actions are improving teaching and helping to increase pupils' progress and attainment.
- Recent improvements in the quality of teaching and effective interventions have rapidly improved the progress that current pupils make across the curriculum.
- Pupils enjoy being at school and benefit from the caring and welcoming environment.
- Teachers make sure that pupils know how to improve their work and give them the opportunity to do so.
- Additional support is provided for pupils when required. As a result, differences in rates of progress for groups of pupils are diminishing.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They are polite to each other and adults.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase rates of progress and raise attainment across the school by consistently:
 - ensuring effective use of learning time by matching work to pupils' starting points and moving pupils on when they are ready to do so
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to deepen and extend their knowledge, skills and understanding
 - identifying and addressing when pupils are not sufficiently focused on their learning to improve resilience and learning attitudes.
- Develop middle leaders' skills so they can support senior leaders to improve teachers' impact and by leading their areas of responsibility.
- Improve pupils' attendance through effective engagement with parents.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The new headteacher and governing body have acted swiftly and wisely to improve pupils' attainment and progress. Both have been in decline for all groups of pupils in recent years. There are now clear expectations for the quality of teaching and teachers are held to account for their performance. There are effective procedures for assessing and recording pupils' attainment and progress.
- Leaders are strongly motivated, fully committed and ambitious to improve outcomes for pupils. They take decisive and strong actions to achieve this. Their vision is shared by other staff at the school. Strong leadership is successfully addressing previous weaknesses and forging ahead with successful changes that are reversing a legacy of underachievement.
- Senior leaders carefully evaluate accurate information from a wide range of sources to form a realistic view of how the school is doing. They use this to create clear improvement plans and prioritise their actions. This approach is improving teaching and, although it is early days, is starting to have an impact on improving outcomes.
- New systems are in place to collect information about how well pupils are doing. Leaders analyse this information for different groups of pupils in each year group. Pupils who are not performing as well as they might are identified and appropriate interventions provided. These pupils have opportunities to catch up with their peers.
- Staff, including those at an early stage in their teaching careers, benefit from training and development opportunities. Leaders are starting to use the expertise of staff to train others as the quality of teaching at the school improves. Leaders make precise judgements about the quality of teaching linked to pupils' progress.
- Pupils prepare well for life in modern Britain and they talk with confidence about their knowledge of British values. This understanding forms the basis for the high levels of respect and tolerance pupils demonstrate for themselves and each other, celebrating the diversity that exists within the school community. Pupils are welcoming to those joining the school and go out of their way to make them feel welcome. For example, they support those who are learning English by translating for them.
- The school's curriculum quite rightly prioritises the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy. However, this is not to the detriment of a wide range of subjects. Pupils enjoy and engage with their learning. Pupils now enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular activities too, including opportunities in sport and pastimes such as reading and crafts.
- Leaders benefit from working with colleagues at other schools within the ESPRIT network and from strong support from the local authority. For example, the accuracy of assessments carried out by the school is assured and teaching gains from sharing best practice.
- In the past, disadvantaged pupils have not benefited enough from additional funding to support their learning and progress. This is reflected in pupils' outcomes where there have been differences between how well disadvantaged pupils at the school do compared with other pupils nationally. Pupil premium funding is now used to greater

effect to improve these pupils' progress.

- Leaders plan how they use the sports premium funding the school receives well. Specialist sports coaches are employed to deliver high-quality physical education lessons. In addition, promotion of sporting opportunities has resulted in increased pupil participation in extra-curricular sport.
- Leaders routinely evaluate the impact of additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure that interventions planned are effective. As a result, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar rates of progress to other pupils in the school.
- Middle leaders are new in post. Although they have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and are ambitious to succeed, their experience and skills are limited. Appropriate training and coaching are in place to support these colleagues. The effectiveness of middle leaders in supporting senior leaders' work has yet to be demonstrated because this aspect of leadership is not yet fully established.

Governance of the school

- There has been decisive action to secure standards amid a decline in the performance of the school. The relatively new governing body has contributed well to recent improvements in provision and raising standards. Appropriate use is made of each individual governor's skills and expertise. An audit of governors' skills has been undertaken and appropriate additional training arranged.
- Governors effectively challenge leaders. This is evident in minutes of meetings, for example where governors scrutinise information about pupils' performance and leaders' spending plans. They ask leaders challenging questions about their work and the impact they are having.
- Governors review the attainment of different groups of pupils and monitor the progress of pupils in each year group. They use the targets in the school's improvement plan well to evaluate the progress leaders are making towards improving pupils' outcomes. Governors have a realistic picture of the current overall effectiveness of the school.
- Governors organise the management of the performance of the executive headteacher and head of school and scrutinise recommendations about the pay and performance of other staff.
- Governors ensure that the additional funding the school receives is used effectively.
- There is an outward-facing culture within the governing body and governors are supportive of decisions to further develop the school's relationship with the ESPRIT network.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding within the school. Safeguarding is a priority and all staff play a part in keeping pupils safe.
- Staff and governors take part in regular training and so are kept fully up to date and have high levels of awareness of their roles and responsibilities. They know, for example, how to raise concerns with designated leads for safeguarding. Effective systems accurately record and note any concerns. Where appropriate, issues are referred to external agencies resulting in swift and appropriate action to support vulnerable pupils.
- Strong recruitment processes include rigorous checks carried out by the school before a member of staff is employed. All adults working at the school are carefully vetted before they are permitted to work with pupils. Documentation is comprehensive.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- With recent changes to the leadership of teaching, several new systems and approaches have been introduced. Although staff have taken these on board wholeheartedly, there are inconsistencies in their use.
- Teachers do not consistently use their knowledge of how well pupils are doing during a lesson to ensure that learning tasks meet their needs. Some pupils are not being challenged enough and others are not being moved on quickly once they have consolidated their learning. Pupils, particularly the most able, are not challenged enough to support more rapid rates of progress or to achieve at greater depth.
- Teachers do not sufficiently develop pupils' skills in finding solutions to their problems, using reasoning to find solutions or maintaining their concentration. During lessons, when teachers focus their work on individuals or small groups, they are not aware of when other pupils have become disengaged from their learning and so do not address this. As a result, pupils can be off task, slowing their learning and that of others.
- Leaders have prioritised improving pupils' writing, and pupils are developing the necessary skills well. Pupils redraft their writing, and focus on improving their vocabulary, content, spelling, punctuation and grammar. Pupils now have more opportunities to write than they did in the past, and this is having a positive impact on outcomes, but the range of writing genres remains limited.
- A systematic approach to developing pupils' reading skills has been implemented in response to historically poor rates of pupils' achievement at the end of key stage 2. The quality of questioning in reading lessons is effective in helping pupils' understanding of texts. However, in some guided reading sessions, routines are not fully established. As a result, adults are not always able to focus on learning because they are reinforcing expectations.
- In mathematics, there is now a greater focus on using and applying mathematical skills, which has led to improvements in pupils' outcomes. Teachers carefully identify which mathematical skills are less secure and make sure that these are addressed in their lesson planning. Pupils relish opportunities to use their skills to solve

mathematical problems.

- Teachers' feedback to pupils has a positive impact on learning. Pupils clearly understand and benefit from 'gap tasks' where teachers provide them with advice to improve their work.
- Teaching assistants are most effective when providing interventions for small groups of pupils out of the class. Pupils are accurately identified for these sessions, and their progress is checked on regularly. Sessions are focused on removing learning barriers and accelerating progress. Once pupils have caught up with their peers, they return to the main class.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils have many opportunities to become involved in the school community, for example serving as an elected member of the school council or working as a library monitor. Pupils learn about caring for others through these opportunities, which contribute positively to their personal development.
- Pupils benefit from good pastoral care provided by all members of staff and external agencies when appropriate. Pupils enjoy being in school because of the caring culture, clear routines and a lively and welcoming learning environment.
- Staff encourage pupils to be kind, honest and respectful towards others. Learning about different faiths and cultures is integrated into the curriculum. Pupils celebrate the diversity found within the school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is successfully promoted and they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Transition arrangements from Alexandra Infants School have been strengthened through federation and shared leadership and governance. Prior information about pupils is used effectively to ensure that their learning and pastoral needs are met from the outset.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school and can talk with knowledge about how they keep themselves safe. Parents agree that children are safe when at school.
- The personal development and welfare of the small number of pupils who are educated away from the school site are checked carefully by school staff visits and regular contact with the alternative provider.
- There are strong relationships between pupils and with staff. This ensures that pupils are not afraid to ask for help when they need it. However, class teachers do not focus enough on teaching pupils how to persevere, manage distractions and become successful, independent learners. As a result, pupils are over-reliant on adults when learning and can become distracted from the task in hand.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Around the school, and at social times, pupils are polite, well mannered and courteous towards each other and adults. Behaviour has improved since the introduction of a new approach to behaviour management. Pupils respond well to positive conduct being rewarded such as the 'good to be green' system and are clear about the consequences of their actions. Almost all parents who responded to Parent View felt that the school makes sure that pupils are well behaved.
- Pupils take pride in their school. They keep the school environment free from litter and readily help to tidy up. They wear their uniforms smartly and correctly.
- The school's records show that there are very few instances of inappropriate behaviour. Pupils report that incidents of bullying are rare and are swiftly and effectively dealt with by adults in school. Exclusions from school are extremely rare.
- Leaders strive to engage families so that they see the value of sending their children to school. Staff work hard to improve attendance, and absences from school are investigated promptly to ensure pupils' welfare. There is positive, demonstrable impact of the actions staff take. However, pupils' attendance is lower than the national average, particularly for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' attainment and progress require improvement. Previous poor-quality teaching and inconsistency caused by a turnover of teachers have contributed to historic low progress and attainment.
- In 2016, although the results have yet to be fully validated, pupils' progress was below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Higher quality teaching and very effective additional interventions for targeted pupils have had a positive impact on current progress. Almost all pupils in Year 6 are making the progress that leaders expect of them and an increasing proportion making faster progress than this, particularly in writing.
- Leaders' analysis of assessment information for current Year 6 pupils suggests marked improvements in the proportion of pupils achieving age-related expectations. Almost three quarters of pupils are likely to achieve the expected standard in writing. Over half of pupils are projected to reach expected standards in reading and mathematics.
- Leaders predict further increases in attainment for subsequent year groups. Two thirds of pupils in Year 5 are on course to achieve expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion increases further for younger pupils. The proportion of pupils, particularly the most able, attaining at high levels is also expected to increase, but at a slower rate.
- The impact of the pupil premium has not been apparent for past cohorts of pupils. In 2016, only one in five disadvantaged pupils achieved the expected levels in reading and mathematics, and fewer achieved the expected level in writing by the end of key stage 2. Currently, rates of progress in reading and writing are similar for all Year 6

pupils. In mathematics, disadvantaged pupils are progressing at faster rates than their peers.

- Better teaching and successful, additional interventions for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have resulted in improving, but uneven, rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics across all year groups. Many more of these pupils are likely to reach age-related expectations by the end of key stage 2 as a result.
- Current rates of progress for pupils who speak English as an additional language in Year 6 are similar in reading and writing to those of other pupils. A higher proportion of these pupils than their peers exceed leaders' expectations of progress in mathematics.
- Leaders carefully monitor the progress of pupils who attend an alternative provider. The progress these pupils make prepares them well for the next stage of their education.
- As a result of increased rates of progress, pupils are now better prepared for secondary school than in the past. However, the recent sharp improvements in progress and attainment must be sustained to ensure that pupils have secured the basic skills needed for a successful transition to secondary school.

School details

Unique reference number	124033
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10025360

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	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	219
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Angie Walmsley-White
Executive headteacher	Dawn Shaw
Telephone number	01782 235377
Website	www.alexandra-jun.stoke.sch.uk
Email address	sknight@sgfl.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 October 2012

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Since the last inspection, the school has formed a federation, led by an executive headteacher, with Alexandra Infants School. A head of school is also in post. The governing body has been reconstituted and has responsibility for both schools.
- The school has developed links with ESPRIT, a network of local schools.
- The school did not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6, in 2015.
- This school is smaller than the average-sized school.

- Approximately two in five pupils are known to be eligible for support through pupil premium funding, which is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is much higher than the national average.
- Over three quarters of pupils are from minority ethnic groups, which is much higher than the national average. Two thirds of pupils speak English as an additional language. The largest ethnic groups are of Pakistani and White British heritage.
- A very small number of pupils access all their education with Merit Pupil Referral Unit, an alternative provider.
- There is below-average stability as pupils move in and out of the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited classrooms to observe teaching and learning in all year groups. They looked at work in pupils' books and spoke to pupils about their work. On some of these visits, inspectors were accompanied by senior leaders. An inspector also heard pupils read.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, head of school and other leaders and staff, governors and a member of the local authority. Inspectors also considered the views of staff through 12 online questionnaire responses.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school at social times. They looked at the school's records about behaviour and spoke to pupils to evaluate their views. An inspector met formally with a group of pupils.
- Inspectors took account of 75 recent responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) during the inspection and comments made.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement, records of pupils' achievement and progress, and information about attendance. They also evaluated documents related to protecting pupils and keeping them safe.

Inspection team

Rob Hackfath, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Amarjit Cheema	Ofsted Inspector
Gill Turner	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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