

Tower Primary School

Tower Road, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 7LP

Inspection dates

2–3 March 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- The overall effectiveness of the school has declined since the previous inspection because of weak leadership and weak teaching over time. Governors and the headteacher have not established effective senior or middle leadership to overcome weakness.
- As a result of inadequate teaching, at the end of key stage 2, too few pupils make good progress from their starting points, particularly in mathematics.
- Teaching has failed and continues to fail to meet the needs of pupils because teachers' expectations of the standard of pupils' work are too low. As a result of weak teaching, pupils' outcomes across key stages 1 and 2 are inadequate. Progress is weak especially in writing and mathematics.
- Teacher assessments are not accurate and are not used to plan lessons that will help pupils to learn quickly. Reading, writing and mathematics are not checked systematically across the curriculum. Pupils underachieve and are poorly prepared for their next stage in education.
- The school's policy on marking and feedback is not clear enough. Teachers therefore do not give pupils consistent guidance and pupils are unsure about what it is they need to do to improve their work. Teachers do not challenge pupils about the quality of their work or its presentation.
- Teaching assistants are not well managed by some teachers. The impact that teaching assistants have on supporting pupils' learning is minimal.
- Pupils' behaviour requires improvement. In some classes expectations of behaviour are not high enough. Low-level disruption interrupts learning. Attendance is too low for all pupils and in particular for those who are disadvantaged.
- Leaders' views of the effectiveness of the school are too generous. Plans for improvement are not focused tightly enough on pupils' progress. Governors have not held leaders to account well enough to ensure that statutory duties are in place to evaluate how well teachers are improving pupils' outcomes.

The school has the following strengths

- Safeguarding is effective and the team cares passionately for the school's most vulnerable pupils.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make better progress than their peers because of the targeted support they receive.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so it is consistently good and all groups of pupils make good progress especially in reading, writing and mathematics, by ensuring that teachers:
 - have good subject knowledge so that the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics are taught well
 - assess pupils' learning accurately so that it informs future learning
 - have high expectations of what all pupils can achieve to accelerate pupils' progress
 - set work that challenges pupils to make good progress and matches their needs and abilities, including the most able
 - have consistently high expectations of pupils' presentation of their work
 - consistently and effectively plan for and direct the work of teaching assistants
 - have consistently high expectations of pupils' behaviour so that low-level disruption does not interrupt learning.
- Urgently improve the impact of leaders at all levels by:
 - clarifying expectations of the school's policies on feedback, presentation and pupils' behaviour
 - having high expectations of what is required to ensure good teaching and good pupils' outcomes
 - making sure that the curriculum is well taught across a wide range of subjects so that pupils are well prepared for their next stage of education
 - leadership of mathematics ensuring accurate monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching across the school
 - using information from monitoring and evaluation to ensure good subject knowledge and effective professional development.
- Urgently improve the impact of governors, by ensuring that:
 - leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's overall effectiveness
 - leaders' plans for improvement sharply focus actions on improving pupils' progress with precise measures for success linked to the quality of teaching
 - the headteacher is held to account for effective leadership structures, including teachers' performance management

- leaders are held to account for the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.
- Ensure that pupils attend regularly and on time in order to provide consistency and continuity in their learning.
- Improve the early years by ensuring that:
 - teaching in the Reception Year is consistently good and adults have high expectations of what all children can achieve regardless of their varying starting points
 - children's progress is good so that the proportion of children who achieve a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year increases
 - leaders implement focused plans for improvement of children's outcomes for which all staff are held to account.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Leaders and governors have not established effective leadership across the school and particularly in key stages 1 and 2. This has resulted in weak teaching and pupils underachieving. This limits the capacity for the school to improve. Considerable staff turnover since the previous inspection has also undoubtedly slowed plans for improvement.
- Plans for improvement do not focus sharply on the key priorities to improve pupils' outcomes. Measures to judge the success of actions are vague and lack precision. Despite the low outcomes at the end of the Reception Year, there is nothing to target this area in the school's plans for improvement.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is not accurate. Senior and middle leaders' expectations are not high enough. They are too generous when checking the work of the school. Pupils' work has not been checked thoroughly enough to gain an accurate view of pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching across the school. Senior leaders have not checked that teachers are applying school policies consistently well or that leaders' expectations are sufficiently clear.
- The curriculum is poorly taught. Although the range of subjects is sufficient, weak teaching has resulted in pupils having poor knowledge, skills and understanding. The curriculum, therefore, does not prepare pupils well for the next stage in their education as their reading, writing and mathematical skills are not good enough. Pupils spoken to during the inspection were eloquent and many are capable of much more than they are currently achieving. Pupils said that they would welcome more challenge, especially in mathematics.
- The performance management system for teachers is not fit for purpose and has not, therefore, provided the challenge of underperformance and identification of professional development. Some teachers have not had targets set for them that should have been in place by October 2016.
- The use of the pupil premium to support the most vulnerable pupils has been largely ineffective. Disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are not making sufficient progress. Over time, disadvantaged pupils' attendance has been in the lowest 10% of schools nationally and shows few signs of improving.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities fare better than others in the school. Additional funding to support the pupils is used effectively. This is because the recently appointed leader has rapidly and rigorously checked and supported the quality of provision, including the support from learning support assistants. Pupils are making good progress in reading and mathematics, although writing lags behind.
- There is still much to be done to ensure that all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and direct the teaching assistants more effectively.
- Leaders of English and mathematics have only been in place since September 2016. Although some actions have been taken in English, there is little yet to show impact. Development plans for both English and mathematics mirror those of the school's overall plan for improvement and therefore are not focused sharply on pupils'

outcomes.

- Mathematics continues to be a key priority for the school and leaders have not responded quickly enough to what urgently needs to be done to improve pupils' progress. Capacity for effective leadership of mathematics across the school is not secure.
- The physical education and sports funding is used effectively to provide specialist teaching and to increase teachers' skills and knowledge. Pupils enjoy the opportunities that this gives them.
- Leaders and governors have accepted extensive support from Herts for Learning. However, this has had little impact on improving the outcomes of pupils or the quality of either leadership and management or teaching. Challenge to leaders by the local authority has been too slow and has failed to hold leaders and governors to account for the decline in the standard of education since the previous inspection.
- Parents are largely positive about the school and the way their children are cared for and supported by leaders and teachers.
- Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Governance of the school

- The work of governors has been inadequate as it has failed to prevent a steady decline in standards since the previous inspection.
- Governors have paid little credence to the school's pay policy. Although governors have ensured that the performance of the headteacher is regularly checked, they have not made sure that the rest of the staff have had a similar experience and opportunity. Governors have not requested information from the headteacher about teachers' performance.
- Although governors have offered some challenge to the headteacher, the information they have received has not been sufficiently well checked to ensure effective leadership, outcomes or teaching.
- Governors monitor the finances of the school robustly. However, they do not always receive sufficient information to evaluate the effectiveness of additional government funding for all disadvantaged pupils in the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have made sure that all staff follow policies and procedures to ensure that safeguarding is effective. The vast majority of pupils say they feel safe, know who to go to if they are worried about anything, and have confidence that adults will help them.
- Appropriate checks are made to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children.
- Leaders work effectively with other agencies and parents to ensure that children and families receive the support they need. The headteacher works closely with social

services and other providers who give advice to parents and families alike.

- Governors check the quality of the school's work in safeguarding pupils and know that it is effective. They regularly check the school's records and ensure that up-to-date training is provided to all governors and staff.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Weak teaching over time has led to pupils underachieving and often making inadequate progress, especially in mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils sometimes make more progress than the inadequate progress of their peers. However, when compared with all pupils nationally, this group of pupils do not fare well.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been numerous and significant changes in staffing, and many short-term teachers. This has left pupils with a lack of continuity in teaching and has undoubtedly inhibited their progress.
- Inspectors undertook an analysis of pupils' work, which showed that writing skills are weak and mathematics skills poor. The lack of a consistent handwriting policy hinders pupils in the presentation of their written work, which is exceptionally poor. Very little attention is given to ensuring that pupils use English grammar, punctuation and spelling accurately or apply their basic skills in writing in other subjects.
- Some teachers do not have the relevant subject knowledge to teach mathematics with confidence. As a result, achievement in this area of the curriculum is not good enough. There is very little evidence of pupils having opportunities to develop and apply mathematical skills across other subjects.
- Teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve and some do not insist on good behaviour in lessons. Consequently, some pupils' learning is interrupted and many do not achieve what they are capable of.
- Weak assessment leads to work that is not effectively planned. Activities are often not well matched to the needs of individuals and do not move pupils on in their learning. Pupils say they often repeat work that they already know. As one pupil said, 'We did this last year.' Poor behaviour is sometimes evident as pupils lose interest in what is being taught. This leads to time being lost as teachers concentrate on the behaviour of some pupils while the learning of others slows.
- The majority of teaching necessarily focuses on ensuring that pupils master basic skills. However, this often means that teachers do not routinely provide opportunities to challenge the most able pupils, who typically say that 'This is easy peasy. I find it so easy!'
- Teachers do not consistently direct the work of teaching assistants effectively, and do not routinely check to ensure that the pupils being supported are making the best progress they can. There are, however, small pockets of good practice, such as seen where pupils were playing 'time bingo'. The teaching assistant brought the game to life by saying, 'That's right, your card says one o'clock. What do we normally do at that time of the day?'
- The work of learning support assistants with some pupils who have significant needs is generally more effective in supporting pupils to make good progress.

- Few teachers are confident in using creative and imaginative approaches to inspire and motivate pupils. As a result, pupils are lethargic in lessons and lose interest in the sometimes mundane activities they are given to complete. In a minority of classes, pupils yawned and slouched, putting their heads on their desks.
- Where teaching is most effective, it is because it is very carefully targeted to pupils' needs and enables them to move on in their learning. This is most evident in the early years, but also in small pockets of teaching in other classes. In one class, pupils were debating the meanings of different words and whether they could find an antonym. Pupils eagerly used thesauruses to find, for example, the antonym of 'energetic'. Many pupils offered suggestions and the one that was finally decided upon was 'lethargic'.
- Despite there being expectations about what teachers should comment upon, there is no consistent approach to giving pupils feedback on how to improve their work. As a result, pupils are unsure as to what they need to get better at. In the most instances when teachers give any feedback, pupils take little heed of it.
- Teachers in key stage 1 have improved the teaching of phonics, which is leading to better reading skills. The phonics session seen during the inspection captivated the pupils. It was lively and well matched to pupils' abilities while challenging the most able.
- Pupils do not have a thirst for reading. Inspectors, who spoke to a group of six pupils, found that only two of them enjoyed reading. Some of the books pupils choose as 'free readers' are not as appropriate as they should be for either the age or ability.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils say they feel safe, enjoy coming to their 'friendly and kind' school and do not experience bullying. They know that bullying is when someone 'is being unkind on a daily basis'. They say that teachers deal quickly with any unkindness.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe on the internet because this is taught well. There are numerous references to how pupils should ensure their safety. Pupils say they know, for example, that they should not share personal information with anyone else, or tell anyone their password.
- The school cares for vulnerable pupils by ensuring that such provision as the 'rainbow room' or 'calm room' are available when needed. The lunchtime club also helps to ensure that some pupils remain well occupied at this time of the day.
- Pupils' pride in their work is variable with very few examples of well-presented work across the school. Attitudes to learning are not consistently positive and some pupils interrupt the learning of others and do not always persist with their own work.
- The vast majority of pupils are well-mannered and polite, saying 'you're welcome' when inspectors thanked them for showing them their work. They help each other and are proud of the work they do, for example, to raise money for the Addenbrooke's Charity.

- The school is an inclusive community in which pupils of all abilities, cultures and backgrounds are welcomed and very well accepted. As one pupil eloquently explained, 'People can be different even though you can't always see it.'
- Pupils understand how democracy works in their school when they vote for pupil representatives on the school council. The school teaches about democracy in the wider community. Many displays allude to current news stories, for example, who the prime minister of England is and what she does, and how the government makes decisions.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Some learning is affected by low-level disruption from some pupils. This is particularly the case where teachers do not set high enough expectations of pupils' behaviour.
- The majority of pupils' conduct around the school, in the dining hall and on the playground is improving. Since staffing has been more stable, the number of behaviour incidents in the spring term has fallen considerably from the autumn term.
- Pupils say behaviour is largely good. If, on occasions, it is not so, they say that adults deal with it quickly. However, some staff say, 'behaviour is not always dealt with consistently'. Inspectors noted that pupils understood what is expected of them in the majority of classes.
- Attendance has been below the national average for some groups of pupils since the previous inspection. The school has systems in place to raise the profile of good attendance and the negative impact poor attendance has on pupils' learning. However, the attendance of some pupils remains in the lowest 10% of the country.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Weak teaching and leadership have not strengthened the progress that pupils are making, especially in writing and mathematics.
- The school did not meet the government's minimum expectations for pupils in Year 6 in 2015. There was some improvement in outcomes of the very small cohort of Year 6 pupils in 2016. However, pupils' progress in key stage 2 since the previous inspection has been poor, with many different groups of pupils not achieving as well as they could.
- Each year since the previous inspection, attainment at the end of Year 2 has been consistently below that expected in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2016, the progress from the end of the early years to Year 2 in 2016 was below the national average. Writing progress was especially poor.
- Teachers' assessments of pupils' progress and attainment do not accurately reflect the work in pupils' books. The assessments are over-generous and have not been rigorously checked by leaders. As a result, there are several groups of pupils who have not been given the additional support they need to catch up with their peers and they are underachieving. Pupils themselves say that they want to be challenged more.

Inspectors found that pupils were certainly more able than either books or work in class showed. On the 'garden of goals' display, pupils' aspirations were evident. 'I'd like to be a ballerina,' said one, while another wanted 'to help animals like a vet'.

- Inspectors' analysis of pupils' writing skills showed that the majority of pupils make very slow progress across key stages 1 and 2. As a result, their attainment is often a year behind what it should be. The analysis of pupils' work in their books also showed weak mathematical skills and poor development of knowledge, skills and understanding.
- The progress that pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics is very weak and standards are generally low. Pupils are not, therefore, well prepared for their next stage of education; indeed they are poorly prepared.
- There are exceptionally few most-able pupils in the school according to the school's own assessment information and the view of teachers. However, inspectors noted that the most able pupils in school were not challenged enough by the work set for them. This has led to slow progress and some disengagement with their learning.
- Outcomes of disadvantaged pupils in key stages 1 and 2 have been variable over time and do not compare favourably with other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are not making as much progress as they should, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- Pupils currently in the school who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making better progress than the poor progress of their peers. Many pupils who have significant needs have made good progress in reading and mathematics because the targeted support they receive from learning support assistants is paying dividends.
- Inspectors checked pupils' reading skills from across the school and found that they are not making the progress they should. Overall, teachers are not supporting pupils well in understanding what they are reading or encouraging them to enjoy reading. There is, however, some teaching that supports pupils' reading development well, for example in early years and Year 1.
- Effective teaching of phonics in Year 1 has resulted in a marked improvement in the proportion who achieved the required standard in the phonics check in 2016. Pupils in key stage 1 are using these skills better in their reading. Some are also beginning to use phonics with some accuracy in their writing, although this is not widespread.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- The early years leader has an accurate view of how to improve the pre-Nursery, Nursery and Reception provisions. However, these areas are not in the school's overall improvement plans and have therefore not been acted upon. The leader has had a positive impact on improving provision and progress for children but there have been too many staff changes, particularly in the Reception class, to greatly influence the outcomes of children at the end of their time in the early years.
- There are good links with parents and families. Parents contribute to children's learning and increasingly understand the importance they play in enhancing their children's learning. This is undoubtedly helping children to make better progress but has not been quick enough. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development

has been inconsistent over time and, since the previous inspection, has not been in line with the national average.

- A large majority of children enter the Nursery with skills that are significantly below those typically found. Speech and language skills are the weakest but many other areas are also weak on entry. Those children who have spent time in the Nursery are usually better prepared for learning than others entering in Reception.
- Children happily spoke to inspectors about what they were doing. One child, who was dressed as Alice in Wonderland for World Book Day, told inspectors confidently and with enthusiasm that her favourite part of that story was, 'That's the worst teapot ever!'
- Leaders are well aware that further work has to be done to improve the progress children make and diminish their difference in attainment with those of other children nationally. The language-rich environment in the early years ensures that children make progress and some, good progress. Interesting activities capture the children's imagination and they talk excitedly about them. The children have good attitudes to learning.
- Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those that are disadvantaged, make good progress in the early years. This is because leaders have ensured that they accurately assess children's needs and swiftly put in place appropriate provision and support.
- Good use is made of the well-developed outdoor area throughout each day. Children happily play together helping each other, for example to balance on bricks or 'rescue this man who is trapped', as one child said who was playing with the toy fire station.
- Staff make sure that children are kept safe and know how to keep themselves safe. Safeguarding arrangements are effective and the provision meets the statutory welfare requirements for the early years.

School details

Unique reference number	117275
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10023521

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	Maintained
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	188
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gemma Bassett
Headteacher	Joanne Lyness
Telephone number	01920 411000
Website	www.tower.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@tower.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 June 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Tower Primary is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils are White British and those whose first language is not English is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above the national average, as is the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school experiences a larger number of pupils who enter or leave the school during their primary career, and often at times other than the beginning of the academic year.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 13 lessons, some of which were jointly observed with the headteacher. In addition, inspectors made a number of shorter visits to lessons.
- Inspectors heard some pupils read from across the school, including some most-able pupils.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and senior leaders, the lead for early years, the special educational needs coordinator, a group of governors, including the chair and vice-chair, and a group of pupils from across the school. Two meetings were held with two representatives from Herts for Learning, who represented the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of evidence, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, the systems to track pupils' progress, policies, and records relating to behaviour and attendance. They also looked at records of the monitoring of teaching by the headteacher, performance management information, safeguarding documentation and samples of pupils' work in their books.
- The Parent View online survey responses of 29 parents were taken into account, together with the views of those who spoke to inspectors during the school day and those who responded by text.
- Fourteen responses from the staff survey were considered.
- Inspectors spoke informally to pupils during lessons and looked at the work in their books.

Inspection team

Ruth Brock, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mark Jones	Ofsted Inspector
Jacqueline Bell-Cook	Ofsted Inspector

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