

Walkern Primary School

High Street, Walkern, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 7NS

Inspection dates

17–18 October 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have not ensured that pupils in key stage 2 make enough progress in reading and writing for the school to remain good.
- Governors do not have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are not holding the school to account as well as they should.
- Leaders do not have systematic processes for self-evaluation. Improvement plans are not sufficiently sharp to raise pupils' achievement.
- The headteacher carries out too many of the managerial roles. Other leaders are new to their roles and their impact is unproven.
- Pupils' progress in key stage 2 in reading has been significantly below that of pupils nationally for two years. Currently, the progress groups of pupils make in reading remains mixed.
- Teachers do not use assessment sufficiently well to adapt learning activities. Consequently, they do not meet pupils' individual needs consistently well. There are not enough pupils currently working at greater depth in key stage 1.
- Adults' expectations of pupils are, at times, too low. They do not provide the most able pupils with sufficiently challenging and interesting work for them to excel across the curriculum.
- The quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation varies too much. Adults do not reinforce good habits regularly enough for younger pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils' behaviour is good. They are polite and welcoming. They respond quickly to adults' instructions and work well in class.
- Pupils achieve well in mathematics. Teachers provide pupils with a variety of activities that are suited to their needs. Pupils make good progress.
- The teaching of phonics is effective. Pupils enjoy reading at home and at school.
- Children start well in the Reception Year. Staff ensure that the transition into school life is effective. Children are well settled and understand the routines and expectations.
- There is a strong sense of community. Most parents, pupils and staff are very positive about the work of the school.
- Pupils are safe and very well looked after at school. Parents fully agree.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - implementing systems and procedures to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the school, so that self-evaluation is thorough and accurate
 - having school improvement plans that focus sharply on raising pupils' progress and achievement
 - providing middle leaders with training and opportunities to raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, so that they can be rigorously held to account for the consistent progress pupils make.
- Improve pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring that pupils make good progress in key stage 2, so that more pupils consistently reach the required, and higher, standards in reading and writing
 - raising the proportion of most-able pupils who work at greater depth, so that more consistently achieve the higher standards by the end of key stage 1.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - teachers using assessment information effectively to adapt learning opportunities to meet individual needs
 - providing most-able pupils with the opportunity to excel across the curriculum
 - adults insisting on consistent presentation and handwriting
 - raising the profile of reading and providing activities in reading lessons that sufficiently interest and challenge all pupils.

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

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have not maintained the good standard of education. In 2016 and 2017, the progress pupils made at the end of key stage 2 was significantly below national averages in reading and writing.
- The headteacher and governors have an overgenerous view of the school's performance. This is because leaders do not critically reflect upon or analyse the school's performance well enough. Leaders and governors are not rigorously identifying the correct strengths and weaknesses. School improvement plans are not sharply focused on accelerating the progress that different groups of pupils are currently making.
- The headteacher holds too many significant managerial roles and this limits the effectiveness of leadership overall. Some middle leaders are new to their posts and their impact is too new to assess. Others have not yet received sufficient training or opportunities to be as effective in their roles as they could be. Where middle leaders have received training, such as in mathematics, they are proving effective in raising pupils' achievement.
- Leaders use additional funds appropriately for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has lower-than-average numbers of pupils who attract the extra money. Case studies show how leaders support pupils so that they can make good personal and pastoral progress during their time at school. However, the academic progress these pupils make is mixed.
- Although adults receive appraisal targets, these are not yet rigorous enough to hold teachers to account for the progress pupils make. This is because targets do not link well enough to school improvement planning.
- As no staff responded to their online questionnaire, it is not possible to report on how well leaders promote an ambitious culture. However, staff demonstrate dedication to their roles and responsibilities. They participate in training opportunities provided by the local authority to improve their skills further.
- The curriculum is relevant and balanced. It covers all the areas of the national curriculum. Staff make links between subjects such as history and geography through topics. Additional trips and experiences help pupils gain a wider understanding of the topics they study.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well provided for. The care and guidance pupils receive are strengths of the school. In an assembly during the inspection, pupils maturely responded and explained how to 'not judge a book by its cover'. They demonstrated that they understood the moral of the story and thought deeply about how they could show tolerance and acceptance of others.
- The school provides a range of additional clubs which boost pupils' social and cultural experiences. These include sports, gardening and art activities. One parent commented: 'The children can grow flowers, fruit and vegetables, have plenty of space to run around on the field and can also explore the outdoor equipment.'

- Leaders use additional funding for sports well. Pupils participate in a range of sporting competitions that are organised locally. Pupils benefit from a variety of activities at lunchtimes, especially developing the roles of sports leaders.

Governance of the school

- The governing body is not as effective as it could or should be. This is because governors do not have sufficient understanding of pupils' achievement. Consequently, they do not have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
- Governors support the school well and ensure that the pastoral care of its pupils is given a high priority. However, their level of challenge to school leaders is not yet sufficiently rigorous to improve pupils' outcomes, particularly in key stage 2, where mobility of pupils is an additional difficulty the school faces.
- Governors are dedicated to the school's success and have the capacity to govern the school with further training. They work well with the local authority to ensure that the headteacher is set relevant performance targets and that finances are routinely scrutinised. In these aspects, the governing body is effective.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Statutory child protection training is in place. All staff and governors have benefited from recent training and are fully aware of their duties and responsibilities. Staff receive regular updates when necessary.
- The headteacher keeps child protection records in good order and concerns are followed through with other agencies, so that the best outcomes for pupils are achieved. Staff work well together to review their practice and provide good-quality support for vulnerable pupils.
- Governors check that school leaders carry out the necessary checks when they recruit new members of staff. The records of these checks are compliant and kept in good order.
- Parents are positive about their children's school. All parents who responded to their online questionnaire, Parent View, stated that their children are happy, safe and well looked after. One parent commented: 'I feel confident that my children are in a safe and happy environment; they love going to school.'

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet consistently good. This is because teachers do not use assessment information as well as they should in order to match work closely enough to the needs and abilities of all groups of pupils. As a result, some pupils do not make the progress that they could.

- Teaching does not fully challenge pupils of different abilities so that individuals can make more progress. Pupils' books demonstrate that adults provide them with work that is appropriate for their age. However, activities, particularly in English, do not provide pupils with enough work that demands more of them or deepens the learning well enough. This limits the progress pupils make. Older pupils commented that they enjoy the challenge they receive in mathematics so that they can demonstrate their skills, and that this is not the same in English.
- The quality of teaching in reading is not ensuring that pupils make sufficient progress from their different starting points. This is because some activities in guided reading lessons lack a clear purpose or a focus on deepening pupils' skills in understanding and appreciating a wide range of texts. Older pupils do not consistently read with the expression and full understanding that demonstrate their ability.
- Adults provide many opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills, in English and in other subjects. However, adults provide the same list of criteria for pupils to follow, irrespective of their previous ability. Pupils' books show that this is the case over time. Consequently, the most able pupils are unable to demonstrate the skills of which they are capable, and the less able require too much additional adult support to achieve what is expected. Neither group make the progress they could.
- In subjects other than English and mathematics, the expectation of what pupils can do and should achieve is not as consistently high as it should be. Adults too often provide work that is of the same difficulty, irrespective of pupils' individual ability or starting points. Learning activities in subjects such as history and geography are not sufficiently stimulating for the range of skills or aptitudes in the class. As a result, pupils are not able to demonstrate their capabilities.
- Adults use the school's marking policy increasingly well. Pupils use the opportunities provided to improve spellings and respond to the feedback they receive in line with the policy. Recently, adults have given pupils more chances to edit and redraft their writing. The use of this new approach is becoming increasingly effective but it is too early to assess the impact on the progress that pupils are making.
- Staff and pupils have positive relationships. Pupils follow the guidance they receive diligently and well. Additional staff often provide good support for individual pupils who have additional needs, especially on a one-to-one basis.
- In mathematics, adults ensure that pupils have many opportunities to develop their reasoning skills. They provide a wide range of activities that increase in difficulty, so that more pupils have to think and work hard. In upper key stage 2, pupils are challenged in mathematics and the work is suitably matched to the needs of different groups of pupils. Pupils relish the opportunities they are given and most make good progress from their starting points.
- The quality of teaching in phonics is effective. Adults ensure that younger pupils practise their sounds and corresponding letters regularly and systematically. Consequently, even though in 2017 results in phonics were lower than those nationally, teaching is helping current pupils make better progress this academic year.
- Evidence from pupils' home-school reading diaries demonstrates that many families use these diligently to listen to and encourage their children's reading. Pupils very much enjoy reading at home. Younger pupils who read to the inspector used their

understanding of sounds well to read unfamiliar words.

- Staff create a purposeful and stimulating learning environment with useful and attractive displays. Pupils' artwork is celebrated and carefully displayed to show their efforts and skills.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are very proud of their school. They understand and willingly follow the school motto of 'bringing learning alive'. They have respectful relationships with adults.
- Pupils have a strong and age-appropriate understanding of how to keep safe when using a range of technology. They learn about appropriate and positive strategies, through regular lessons, assemblies and specialist visits where they explore keeping safe when using social media or online games.
- Pupils demonstrate a mature understanding of tolerance and acceptance of others' differences, as well as similarities. They speak easily about helping new pupils settle in quickly, especially when they start in key stage 2.
- Pupils understand what bullying is and what it is not. They say that, sometimes, people are unkind and that occasionally there is name-calling. However, they are certain that the headteacher deals fairly and swiftly with issues.
- Pupils' learning in books seen during the inspection demonstrates that adults do not insist on the highest standards of presentation and handwriting. Consequently, the work pupils produce does not fully reflect their capabilities and the progress pupils are currently making. This is especially true for boys.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They respond quickly to instructions in lessons and complete their work well, even when the activities do not match their needs well enough or are less interesting.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the school, for example when they walk to the outside hall for assemblies, lunch and sports lessons. During less structured times, such as playtimes, they are suitably boisterous but remain polite and respectful. Pupils stated, 'Everyone is friendly and no one gets left out.'
- Attendance has improved and is now broadly in line with the national average. Leaders take increasingly quicker action and now have rigorous monitoring in place to support and challenge families where there is persistent absenteeism. The school provides a well-used breakfast club which has helped reduce both absence and poor punctuality.
- Pupils in Years 5 and 6 work particularly well. Their class is purposeful and pupils settle rapidly to their learning activities. They demonstrate very positive attitudes to their learning, persevering and trying their very best.
- The very small number of pupils who have very challenging behaviour have additional

support in place, which is having a positive impact in most cases. Leaders are proud of the impact staff have on improving behaviour and reducing repeated incidents.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- In 2016 and 2017, pupils in key stage 2 made significantly less progress in reading and writing from their individual starting points than other pupils nationally. Work in pupils' books demonstrates that, currently across key stage 2, pupils still make inconsistent, and in some cases insufficient, progress.
- A number of pupils leave the school at the end of Year 4 to go to a local middle school. Adults are not ensuring that all pupils who remain for upper key stage 2 make good or accelerated progress from their starting points, particularly in reading. As a result, not enough pupils reach the expected or higher standard, and their attainment is below the national average.
- In both 2016 and 2017, pupils did not achieve well in science by the end of key stage 2. Their attainment was below that found nationally. Pupils' books demonstrate that they do not receive enough opportunities to practise their investigation and exploration skills. Pupils of all abilities complete the same worksheets. Progress is slow, particularly for the most able pupils.
- The proportion of key stage 1 pupils who reach the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics has consistently remained at or above national averages over a number of years. However, the proportion of pupils who work at greater depth at key stage 1 has been inconsistent over time. In 2016, the proportion of pupils working at greater depth was below the national average. In 2017, there was an improvement in the achievement of the most able pupils, particularly in reading, which was significantly above the national average. Currently, work in pupils' books indicates that fewer pupils are receiving sufficient opportunity to work at greater depth.
- The number of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in the school is smaller than the national averages. Due to these small numbers, individuals could be identified if their achievement at the end of a key stage is reported. From leaders' case studies, pupils' personal and pastoral needs are well considered. However, the academic progress that disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make from their starting points is, at times, still too variable.
- Pupils make better progress in mathematics in key stage 2 than in English. The progress pupils made in mathematics in 2017 was broadly in line with others from the same starting points nationally. Work in pupils' books demonstrates that they experience learning activities that are more closely matched to their needs and abilities.
- Pupils' achievement in phonics was below the national average in 2017. This was the first time for a number of years. From lessons observed and pupils' use of their sounds when reading, pupils are making good progress in acquiring their early reading skills.

Early years provision

Good

- Children start school well. Staff carry out effective transition arrangements and work well with both the local pre-school and parents to ensure that children feel safe and well cared for. As a result, children have settled well and understand the routines and expectations. One parent commented through the online free-text service: 'They know how to get the best out of the children. My child has settled well and likes the teachers very much.'
- Children start with skills and abilities that are generally typical for their age. In 2017, the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development was broadly in line with the national average. This achievement demonstrated a reversal of a downward trend over the previous three years. The number of children who are exceeding in all areas continues to increase year on year. More children are making good progress from their starting points.
- Children behave well and work very cooperatively together. They are at ease when learning with their friends, whether inside the classroom or outside with bicycles and paint.
- Phonics is taught effectively by the teacher and teaching assistants. Children gain a good knowledge of sounds to support them with their reading and writing. They are encouraged to form letters correctly and practise their written skills frequently.
- The early years curriculum includes attractive activities which capture children's imagination and showcase their talents. All areas of learning are covered well. For example, in one lesson during the inspection, some children practised writing Diwali cards to celebrate the religious festival, while others practised their cookery skills in the kitchen area.
- Children are provided with many well-considered experiences to practise their skills. For example, some children were exploring different materials during their child-initiated learning time. One child proudly stated: 'We are investigating. If you put ice, jelly, sugar and water together and mix, then everything melts.' They were delighted with their results.
- All safeguarding and statutory welfare requirements are met.

School details

Unique reference number	117154
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10036208

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	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	146
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Louise Parkinson
Headteacher	Jonty Hall
Telephone number	01438 861 285
Website	www.walkern.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@walkern.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–10 May 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- This primary school is smaller than average.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium is below the national average.
- All pupils speak English as their first language and the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average. The number of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is below the national average.

- The number of pupils at the end of key stage 2 in 2017 was below the requirements for reporting on the government's floor standards.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector gathered a wide range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included observing all pupils learning in a number of lessons, some of which were jointly seen with the headteacher.
- The inspector spoke formally and informally with pupils and evaluated their books to take account of the work that has been done and the progress that pupils make over time. Pupils' work was considered in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- The teaching of phonics was observed. The inspector listened to pupils read to check their application of sounds.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, curriculum leaders, members of the governing body and one representative of the local authority.
- The inspector examined a range of documentation around safeguarding and scrutinised the checks leaders make when recruiting staff. The inspector considered the arrangements for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Parents' views were taken from the 47 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, together with 21 comments from parents' free-text responses.
- There were no responses to the staff or pupil online questionnaires.

Inspection team

Kim Hall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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