

Ad Astra Infant School

Sherborn Crescent, Canford Heath, Poole, Dorset BH17 8AP

Inspection dates

17–18 January 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- As a result of leaders' determined actions, pupils' outcomes have risen sharply since the school has opened.
- Leaders at all levels are working successfully on the right aspects of improvement. Leaders manage staff performance well.
- The whole-school strategy to teach problem solving and reasoning in mathematics is paying off. Pupils' mathematical skills and knowledge are good.
- Leaders have successfully overhauled the way that reading is taught across the school. As a result, most teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do. Pupils' understanding of what they read is mostly good.
- Children in Reception are well prepared for Year 1. Sometimes, adults' assessments are not as precise as they could be. Consequently, leaders' work to raise expectations is ongoing.
- The teaching of writing is good. As a result, most pupils reach the standards expected for their age. However, in a few classes, teaching is not as challenging as it could be for the middle-attaining and most able pupils. This prevents these pupils from exceeding the standards expected for their age in writing.
- Vulnerable pupils receive caring support that enables them to be ready to learn.
- Leaders take appropriate action to ensure that teaching continues to improve. Pupils' workbooks show that this is mostly effective. However, occasionally teaching is not closely matched to pupils' needs. Sometimes, work is too easy or too hard in Year 1. Leaders' checks on teaching do not yet take full account of the pupils' progress from their starting points.
- Most disadvantaged pupils make swift progress in reading. Their progress in writing is improving but remains less established.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress overall. However, on occasion, these pupils find it difficult to learn effectively because they do not have the right resources or tasks are not closely matched to their needs.
- The trust applies firm challenge to leadership through its regular meetings and visits to the school. Trustees are becoming increasingly focused on measuring the impact of the school's work.
- The proportion of pupils who meet the expected standard in the phonics screening check is above the national average. Most pupils apply their knowledge and understanding of phonics well to spell accurately.
- Pupils' behaviour is usually good. Pupils are proud of their school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further increase the accountability of leaders by ensuring that:
 - the trust holds leaders to account for ensuring that their checks on teaching and learning take note of pupils' starting points, so that pupils' progress is consistently good for all groups of pupils, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities
 - the trust continues to embed its evaluation systems further so that the impact of school improvement initiatives is measured consistently well.
- Continue to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils make strong progress in all years and subjects by making sure that:
 - teachers provide enough challenge so that more middle-attaining pupils, disadvantaged and most-able pupils attain above the expected standards in writing
 - adults' assessments are consistently precise in early years so that a greater proportion of children make rapid progress
 - teaching in Year 1 is more consistently matched to pupils' needs.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the school has opened, leaders' actions have brought about a steep increase in pupils' achievement. As a result, pupils' outcomes are good.
- Leaders manage the performance of staff well. Teachers' targets are matched to raising pupils' performance and improving whole-school effectiveness. The vast majority of staff are very positive about the support and clear direction they receive. Staff said that this clarity helps them refine their teaching and improve pupils' outcomes further.
- Over the last few years, there have been a number of staff changes at leadership level. The leader responsible for standards is enabling greater consistency in monitoring and evaluating school performance data. As a result, the trust is well informed about the school's current performance.
- In recent months, leaders have improved the curriculum. Learning themes motivate pupils and provide appropriate challenge. For example, recent learning on 'gadgets and gizmos' brings together history, geography and technology well. Leaders and teachers insist that pupils use their writing skills across a range of subjects. As a result, pupils' achievement in writing has improved so that more pupils are working at the standards that are expected for their age.
- The executive headteacher and trustees have prioritised leadership programmes for middle leaders. These are having a positive impact. Consequently, there is a strong combined effort from leaders at all levels to maintain continuous improvement. Areas of relative weakness are tackled head on. For example, week on week, year leaders have improved the consistency of teaching across their year teams. Internal support from within the trust is used well to moderate pupils' learning.
- The sports premium funding is used effectively. This has increased the repertoire of sports activities on offer. Pupils also benefit from additional lunchtime coaching. Staff training has improved their teaching skills. The leader evaluates the impact of funding closely and is held to account for its impact by the trust.
- Leaders track the impact of pupil premium funding closely. An extensive range of strategies are in place to support this group of pupils. As a result of in-class support, additional teaching and emotional and social support, these pupils are making typically good progress. Pupils' progress in reading is swift.
- The leader of SEN effectively identifies pupils' needs. Recent training is ensuring that teachers' expectations and subject knowledge are improving to meet the needs of these pupils. However, leaders' actions have not yet ensured that the quality of teaching and learning across the school for this group of pupils is consistently strong. Some pupils receive highly effective support in whole-class situations. Other pupils find it difficult to learn effectively because activities planned for them are too easy or too hard.
- Internal reviews of teaching and learning are comprehensive. Leaders' checks take into account observations of teaching, work in books and additional provision for pupils who need to catch up. This enables middle and senior leaders to confirm whether staff

training and agreed teaching strategies are consistently applied across the school. These reviews have been successful in raising teachers' expectations. However, leaders' checks do not provide teachers with explicit feedback about whether pupils' progress is secure from their different starting points. As a result, a few pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Governance of the school

- The trustees provide a high level of challenge to the school. They do not shy away from asking challenging questions. For example, the chairs of the safeguarding and special educational needs board, standards, and scrutiny committees, keep a close eye on the school's performance. However, on occasion, minutes of meetings do not capture the impact of previous actions.
- In recent months, the trust has introduced a new structure to improve its school improvement function and increase accountability. As a result, there is a more robust process to check and measure the school's performance. This is still recent and so the trust board is aware that it needs to ensure that it is tightly focused on holding each tier of leadership to account for its impact to maximise improvement. In some cases, the structure is too new to evaluate its impact.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Leaders and trustees meet regularly to review the impact of the school's safeguarding policies. Any actions are followed up swiftly. Staff training and vetting checks are up to date and in line with current legislation. Staff spoken to on inspection take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. They talked with confidence about how to apply their training so that pupils' risk of harm is minimised. Leaders responsible for safeguarding make timely referrals and are assiduous in their record-keeping.
- Pupils said that they feel safe and know how to keep safe. Statutory safeguarding requirements are met.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Leaders' intervention to coach and support teachers has been effective in improving the quality of teaching so that it is good. Staff work in teams to assess and review pupils' learning effectively. This ensures that pupils make good progress over time.
- The school's approach to teaching reading ensures that when pupils fall behind they receive additional support to catch up. The whole-school focus on teaching of comprehension skills this year is also bringing about steady improvement in pupils' understanding of what they read. By the end of key stage 1, most pupils read fluently and with good understanding. Occasionally, teachers do not insist that pupils' reading material is challenging enough.

- Improvements to the way that writing is taught across the school mean that many pupils write with good stamina and with an increased level of accuracy and detail. Year group leaders work closely with their teams, and this has improved the consistency of teaching of writing in each year group. However, some middle-attaining pupils and most-able pupils are not challenged enough to ensure that they exceed the standards expected for their age.
- The teaching of mathematics is good. Teaching successfully incorporates an appropriate balance of problem solving and reasoning, and this is enabling pupils to apply their mathematics regularly and with confidence. As a result, a larger proportion of pupils now have the skills and knowledge expected for their age.
- Additional adults provide a range of caring and nurturing support in most classes. Their support is largely effective in ensuring that pupils' learning needs are met. However, in a small minority of classes, where teaching is not consistently strong, teaching assistants are not deployed precisely to support pupils' learning. Consequently, some pupils do not have the resilience required to tackle the tasks on offer or have to wait for an adult to help, so their learning slows.
- Teaching for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is typically good. However, occasionally the work on offer is too hard or too easy. Teachers' checks on pupils' learning are not precise enough for this group of pupils. As a result, a few pupils do not get work that challenges them or they repeat work that they can already do.

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 the 'rights respecting' culture in the school. They have a good understanding of right and wrong. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well.
- The school's breakfast club provides pupils with a safe and positive start to the school day. Pupils enjoy a healthy breakfast and said that they enjoy the activities on offer.
- Vulnerable pupils receive caring support and guidance. This helps these pupils successfully engage in their class learning. Pupils use a variety of resources and visual strategies to enable clear routines. These pupils make good progress in their emotional development.
- Pupils who attend the nurture sessions are well cared for. These pupils' personal and social needs, and ability to share and collaborate with others, are developing well. These pupils are gaining greater resilience to learn and concentrate. However, on occasion the work they receive in these sessions does not build on what they already know. As a result, some tasks are repeated.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Most pupils attend well and enjoy school. As a result of leaders' timely and thorough actions, pupils' attendance has improved swiftly over

the last 12 months. This improvement has continued this year. Pupils' attendance is now well above the national average. While persistent absence is below the national average, a small number of pupils do not attend regularly, and this is not improving quickly enough. Leaders are using wide-ranging strategies to support good attendance for these pupils but they know there is more to do.

- Typically, pupils are intrinsically motivated to learn. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and the vast majority of pupils present their work well. However, a small minority of pupils can be over-dependent on adults to support them to tackle challenges and this slows their progress. Occasionally, when work is not precisely matched to pupils' needs, a few pupils do not maintain complete concentration, and this slows the progress pupils make.
- Pupils said that when bullying happens it is sorted out quickly by teachers. Pupils enjoy their lunchtimes and playtimes. They are polite and have good manners. Most talk positively about school life.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Since the school has opened, pupils' outcomes have improved considerably. As a result, the proportion of pupils achieving the standards that are expected for their age is in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics in 2017.
- The proportion of children reaching a good level of development and the standards expected at the end of early years have increased steeply in recent years. They are now above the national average. Children make good progress overall.
- The proportion of pupils who meet the expected standard in the phonics screening check, in Year 1, has been in line with or above the national average for the last two years. Those pupils who did not meet this standard in Year 1 receive targeted support. As a result, their knowledge and application of phonics are improving quickly so that they read fluently, and their spelling is increasingly accurate. Many of these pupils have already caught up.
- Pupils' outcomes in mathematics are good. Pupils are taught all aspects of the mathematics curriculum. This is enabling a greater proportion of pupils to apply their understanding and tackle learning that deepens their understanding. Consequently, more pupils are achieving standards that are in line with or above those expected for their age this year.
- In the recent past, some previously middle-attaining pupils have not reached the standards expected for their age in writing. Pupils' work books in Year 2 indicate that leaders have been successful in remedying this weakness. Pupils in Year 2 write with increasing complexity, accuracy and length across a range of curriculum subjects. However, too few middle-attaining and most-able pupils make the rapid progress needed to exceed the standards expected for their age.
- Across the last two years, some low- and middle- attaining pupils have not reached expected standards in reading. The whole-school strategy to improve pupils' understanding of what they read, including comprehension skills, is paying off. Consequently, in most classes, pupils learn to both decode text and deepen their understanding successfully. Low-attaining pupils receive regular intervention to catch

up in addition to their daily reading lessons. In Year 1, most of these pupils are catching up well. However, occasionally, pupils do not use their skills to decode unknown words precisely enough. As a result, a few low-attaining pupils make a guess of an unknown word rather than apply their phonics skills, and this limits their accuracy and understanding.

- Pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding make strong progress in reading. Pupils' work books show that these pupils are increasingly able to solve problems and reason in mathematics successfully. Pupils' writing is also improving well, with increasing complexity, accuracy and detail. However, some of these pupils do not yet write with the length and stamina required to meet the standards expected for their age.
- The most able pupils make good progress in reading across the school. They read with keenness and good understanding. However, on occasion, in Year 2 the books they read do not broaden and deepen their understanding of plot and character development because they are conceptually too easy.
- Most pupils who have SEN and or disabilities make good progress by the end of key stage 1. However, in a few classes where pupils' attainment is low, whole-class teaching does not consistently enable these pupils to access learning successfully. So, on occasion, these pupils' progress in Year 1 falters.

Early years provision

Good

- Leaders prioritise the teaching of language and literacy. Developing children's spoken language is central to leaders' work. Children benefit from regular speech and language support that models speaking in full sentences. These sessions are proving successful in enabling those children who enter the school with limited speaking skills to catch up quickly.
- Children's 'discover and explore time' covers a broad range of areas of learning. Increasingly, this time enables children to use and apply previous skills and make choices for themselves.
- Reading sits centrally in the early years curriculum. Children enjoy reading books during their learning inside and outside. The teaching of reading enables children to retell traditional tales and experiment with spoken language, which in turn provides a stimulus for their early writing. Phonics teaching is regular and systematic. Most children get off to a good start and are expected to apply their knowledge of phonics across the school day within the many activities on offer.
- Most recently, the school has raised expectations in the teaching of early writing. As a result, most children are increasingly able to write words and some can write sentences with accuracy. Children's learning records demonstrate that, from their different starting points, the majority of children are making good progress in their writing skills. However, some inconsistencies in teaching are evident. Leaders have already identified this and are taking appropriate and timely action to bring about improvement.
- Funding from the pupil premium grant is used effectively to support children's understanding of early reading, speaking, listening and number. Children's emotional and learning needs are catered for well. The progress of this group of children is

closely tracked. As a result, disadvantaged children are making good progress overall.

- Teachers and other adults use a variety of ways to generate children's interest and learning. Assessments of children's learning are often detailed and used well to plan learning. However, some adults' assessment records focus on what children are doing rather than what children know, can do and understand. As a result, for a few children teaching does not build on adults' assessments of what they already know, and this restricts those children from making rapid progress.
- Adults and children have good relationships. As a result, the vast majority of children have settled to routines well, showing independence and enjoyment.
- Statutory safeguarding and welfare requirements are met.

School details

Unique reference number	141755
Local authority	Poole
Inspection number	10042668

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	268
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Greg Neilson
Executive Headteacher	Kate Carter
Telephone number	01202 602113
Website	www.adastra.poole.sch.uk
Email address	office@adastra.poole.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of information about the curriculum on its website.
- This is a larger-than-average infant school. The school is part of the TEACH multi academy trust, a group of four schools in the local community.
- The executive headteacher is the strategic leader of the four schools in the multi academy trust. The executive headteacher also provides some operational leadership.
- There is a head of school who works across the school and its partner junior school. There are two deputy headteachers. One deputy headteacher is full-time. The other deputy headteacher is responsible for inclusion and works across the school and its partner junior school.
- There is a breakfast club on site. Pupils attend an after-school club run out of one of the other schools in the trust.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and known to be eligible for free

school meals is above the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and are supported by the school is slightly above the national average. The proportion of pupils who are supported by a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is in line with the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Ad Astra Infant School is not required to publish information about the government's floor standards, as these are not applicable.
- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in lessons across the school, some of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Discussions took place with the executive headteacher, the head of school, the deputy headteacher and the head of standards. There were also meetings with the deputy headteacher in charge of inclusion/SEN and/or disabilities, and other middle leaders in the school.
- A meeting took place with four members of the trust board, including the chief executive officer.
- Inspectors scrutinised a number of school documents: the school's evaluation of its own performance, records relating to behaviour, checks on teaching and learning, school performance information, and records of pupils' attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors carried out scrutiny of the quality of pupils' work in books across a range of subjects and year groups.
- An inspector spoke with two groups of pupils to seek their views about the school. The views of other pupils were gathered during lessons and breaktimes. Inspectors also listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, at breaktimes, in the dinner hall and around the school.
- The inspectors considered 54 responses to the online survey, Parent View, as well as free-text responses from parents and carers. Inspectors also talked to parents at the beginning of the school day. Questionnaire responses from 21 members of staff were also analysed.

Inspection team

Julie Carrington, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Martin Bragg	Ofsted Inspector
Gareth Simons	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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