

Pen Mill Infant and Nursery Academy

St Michael's Avenue, Yeovil, Somerset BA21 4LD

Inspection dates

13–14 February 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Despite an improvement in standards in 2018, governors' actions have not been effective in halting a decline in standards over recent years.
- Leaders have identified the priorities for improvement accurately. However, their analysis of whether actions have had the intended impact is not precise enough.
- The quality of teaching is too variable. Pupils do not build up sufficient knowledge and skills in a wide range of subjects.
- Teachers' planning is not well matched to pupils' starting points. There is a lack of challenge for the most able.
- Teachers do not consistently pinpoint pupils' misconceptions. This means that they do not always support pupils to overcome their difficulties, particularly in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Disadvantaged pupils and boys do not achieve well in the early years.
- Newly appointed subject coordinators do not yet have the experience and skills to support school improvement effectively.
- Pupils' conduct around the school during the day is good. However, these compliant attitudes do not always translate into positive learning habits.
- The teaching of phonics is not securely embedded, particularly in the early years.
- Governors' evaluation of how leaders use the additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils and for developing sport has been weak.
- Absence and persistent absence rates are above the national average.

The school has the following strengths

- The interim headteacher and deputy headteacher have formed an effective partnership. They are dedicated, capable and determined to achieve future success for the school.
- Provision for pupils' personal, development and welfare is a strength of the school. Pupils benefit from a positive and nurturing environment.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - governors secure the leadership of the school in the long term and are more stringent in holding leaders to account for the school's performance
 - leaders evaluate the impact of their actions more precisely
 - governors evaluate the impact of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and the development of sport
 - leaders sustain recent improvements, and continue to convey consistent expectations to reduce variations in teachers' practice
 - senior leaders develop the skills of new leaders so that they can support the drive for whole-school improvement.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - developing teachers' skills in using assessment information to plan and adapt their teaching so that it meets the needs of all pupils
 - ensuring that teachers challenge the most able pupils to build on the skills they have
 - identifying pupils' knowledge and understanding accurately to ensure that gaps in learning are reduced quickly, particularly in the early years
 - supporting pupils to deepen their knowledge and skills in a wide range of subjects
 - ensuring that pupils have a secure understanding of how to improve their work, particularly their use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - continuing to escalate strategies to challenge those pupils who do not attend school regularly
 - ensuring that teaching challenges and supports pupils, so that they are not passive or distracted in lessons.

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

- The school is emerging from a period of considerable turbulence within the governing body and at senior leadership level. The result of this is that governors have not held leaders to account for their work with sufficient rigour. The school has been too insular, which means that leaders have not learned from best practice elsewhere or refined their approaches. This has hindered the school's capacity to improve and has limited the progress that pupils make.
- Newly appointed senior leaders have been honest in their evaluation of the school's strengths and the areas that need attention. They do not underestimate the extent of the work that is still left to do. The priorities for improvement are accurate and the strategies they have outlined are well devised. For example, leaders have begun by improving behaviour systems and have introduced more explicit expectations across the school. Staff feel motivated and valued by this collective sense of purpose. This provides a strong foundation from which to build. There is an optimism and confidence in the capability of leaders to make the changes that are needed.
- There is now a greater clarity about the role that middle leaders have in supporting school improvement. In the past, this responsibility was not defined clearly enough and there was a consequent lack of accountability. Current subject coordinators are enthusiastic, committed and willing to take responsibility for improving the quality of teaching and learning. To support this, they now have access to support from outside the school and are extending their networks to learn from best practice. However, middle leadership is not yet secure, as there is still too much variation in the quality of teaching in different aspects of the curriculum.
- The headteacher has a clear vision to introduce a vibrant and enriched curriculum. A recent review of the curriculum has placed an emphasis on developing pupils' artistic and musical talent. Subject leaders are beginning to contribute to the development of the curriculum, but further work is needed to ensure that teachers support pupils to develop secure knowledge, skills and understanding in a broad range of subjects.
- Leaders have introduced closer monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. There is now a more strategic overview of the progress that pupils make. Teachers are beginning to moderate pupils' work with staff from other schools, so there is greater confidence in the reliability of this information. Information about pupils' progress has not been accurate in the past and has led to an over-generous view of the quality of education. However, much of this work is recent, and the impact is not always apparent in improving classroom practice.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not achieve well enough by the end of the early years. They do, however, catch up quickly with their peers as they move through key stage 1. Additional funding to support pupils has been poorly allocated and weakly evaluated in the past. Therefore, leaders have not been able to say with certainty what strategies have been effective, so that they can plan future expenditure. This process has now been much improved, so that leaders are able to identify pupils' barriers to learning and how these will be overcome. As this is a new development, these strategies are

not implemented consistently in classroom practice and their impact is yet to be seen, particularly for younger children.

- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. Leaders have identified the interventions needed and have trained teaching assistants, who support and nurture pupils effectively. Those pupils who have fallen behind have been identified, and support is in place to help them catch up with their peers. Interventions are effective in the short term, but it is less clear how teachers build on these gains so that pupils consolidate their understanding in the longer term.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language are well supported. Leaders have identified pupils who need to develop their spoken language and make sure they have the specialist support to enable them to do so. There is a clear and structured programme to support pupils to have access to all aspects of the curriculum. There is a focus on engaging families. The coordinator overseeing this provision is skilled and proactive in working with families. For example, there is a regular drop-in session, so that families can keep well informed about their children's education.
- Leaders have rightly identified the improvement in pupils' phonic knowledge as a priority. There has been an increased focus on developing these skills. However, the current approach is not yet secure and embedded, which means that current pupils continue to have gaps in their understanding of letters and sounds, particularly in the early years.
- Leaders have worked hard to improve their work with parents and carers. For example, leaders have recently organised 'Inspire' workshops to equip parents with the knowledge they need to support their children's understanding of mathematics and phonics. Parents who responded to Parent View agree that they receive valuable information about their children's progress
- Leaders demonstrate and promote the values that underpin the school's work. They know their pupils well and take every opportunity to engage pupils in conversation and recognise pupils' achievements. The 'golden rules' are visible, and pupils can describe what these rules mean. Leaders have invited pupils to reflect on what makes a good friend and have captured their thoughts on displays around the school.
- Pupils benefit from a range of extra-curricular activities and visits. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about some of these activities. For example, pupils enjoyed their recent visit to a local nursing home. This illustrates a commitment by staff to encourage pupils to make a positive contribution to their community. There are a growing number of examples of pupils benefiting from meaningful activities to develop their understanding of the wider world.
- In the past, leaders have not used the sport premium appropriately to improve participation rates and pupils' awareness of their health and fitness. Current plans show that this has been rectified. Additional funding is being used to train staff, develop swimming competency and ensure the long-term viability of this aspect of the school's provision.

Governance of the school

- Over recent years, governance has not been effective in supporting the school's leaders to make the improvements needed quickly enough. Governors have relied too much on what they have been told by senior leaders, and this has resulted in a decline in standards. Trustees acknowledge this and are determined to improve the effectiveness of their work.
- The governing body has been reconstituted recently. Governors are committed to making the improvements necessary, but the speed of this has been hampered by instability within the governing body. Trustees have now recruited wisely so that governors have the expertise and knowledge to ask challenging and probing questions. Governors have resolved to formulate short-term plans to give the stability necessary, while they finalise decisions about the school's future leadership.
- Governors have commissioned external reviews, and this gives greater confidence in the accuracy of leaders' assertions. In addition, they have had support from neighbouring schools to bolster expertise and mentor newly appointed leaders. They are developing plans so that they can get a first-hand understanding of the quality of education the school provides.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a vigilance around safeguarding. The changes that leaders have made have strengthened practice effectively. The safeguarding policy is up to date and in line with government legislation. All staff know how to apply child-protection procedures and say that they receive confirmation from leaders about actions taken following referrals. Training is up to date and includes training on protecting pupils from radicalisation and exploitation. All statutory checks are made to ensure that staff are safe to work with children. Staff are alert to making sure the site is secure.
- Leaders work with external agencies to provide early help for vulnerable pupils and their families. Staff have a comprehensive knowledge of pupils' contexts and needs. Record-keeping is timely, with a clear chronology of actions taken. However, at times, there is not enough detail in records to allow the resolution of actions to be followed up easily.
- Pupils can explain how to recognise risk, such as when using the road. Pupils who are digital leaders are proud of their responsibility. They are keen to talk about their role in helping pupils to know how to stay safe when online. The majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View agree that their children feel safe in the school. Pupils have recognised the changes that have been made to establish a positive environment. They say that bullying is rare, but that teachers deal effectively with this when it occurs.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching across the school varies too much. Teachers' planning does not take enough account of pupils' starting points. This means that teachers do not

regularly challenge the most able pupils to extend their thinking, so that they are able to demonstrate higher levels of understanding.

- Teachers' use of assessment is developing, but teaching does not routinely identify misconceptions and provide support to remedy historical gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills. This means that pupils are not able to build their subsequent knowledge on secure foundations. It is not always clear to pupils what they need to do next to improve the standard of their work.
- The teaching of mathematics is improving across the school. Leaders have recently taken action to provide more structure to the teaching of mathematics. This is beginning to develop greater mathematical fluency and to improve calculation. Teachers encourage pupils to experiment with alternative methods. Teachers' questioning challenges pupils to revise their thinking when they make errors. However, when the teaching of mathematics is not as assured, pupils make frequent mistakes which are not highlighted and rectified. The most able pupils are not always given the scope they need to apply their skills to problem-solving or reasoning scenarios.
- Pupils write for a variety of audiences and purposes. They understand the characteristics of different genres and apply these in their own compositions. Where teaching is effective, pupils are well supported to structure their writing. The most able pupils can sustain their writing confidently and use descriptive techniques to add a greater depth to their work. However, teachers sometimes give pupils tasks that are limiting and pupils are not then able to demonstrate a greater sophistication to their writing. Where teachers do not address pupils' misunderstandings, pupils continue to make errors in letter orientation, spelling and punctuation. This hampers their ability to express themselves effectively.
- Pupils enjoy reading. They understand the expectation that they read regularly and can talk about their choices of books. However, some pupils do not get enough practice at developing and using their phonic knowledge and skills. This means that they cannot confidently decode unfamiliar words. The most able pupils are proud that they are free readers and read fluently with appropriate expression. When given the opportunity they read avidly.
- Pupils are encouraged to read non-fiction texts and develop their writing skills using stimuli from different subject disciplines. However, the variability in the quality of teaching means that pupils do not acquire sufficient depth in their understanding of subject-specific skills and knowledge.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are taught respect and tolerance and know about other faiths and religions. Global week, for example, encouraged pupils to consider other cultures through sampling food, listening to music and making a range of crafts. Pupils enjoy the opportunities they are given to raise money for charity.

- Pupils know how to stay healthy through exercise and diet. They sit together to eat at lunchtime and are encouraged to have healthy snacks. Leaders emphasise the importance of this aspect of pupils' welfare through vibrant displays across the school and the regular opportunities to take exercise during the school day.
- Staff help pupils to form positive relationships. They give caring and nurturing support to a range of pupils: those who are worried about transition to the next phase of their education; those considered to be vulnerable; or those who have low self-esteem. This helps pupils to be fully involved in the life of the school and to cope with situations that they might find problematic.
- The breakfast club helps pupils to get off to a healthy and productive start to their day. Staff interact positively with pupils through a range of activities.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- The rates of absence, notably persistent absence, are too high, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with SEND. This is largely because leaders have not been stringent enough when challenging absence in the past.
- Current leaders have improved punctuality and are now more robust in challenging the families of pupils who do not attend regularly. These actions have had a modest impact in the short-term on improving overall attendance and persistent absence. Leaders are aware of pupils who are vulnerable and can describe examples of where the support they provided has led to improved attendance. However, they have not escalated concerns quickly enough. It is too early to say whether these improvements will be sustained over a longer period of time.
- Where teaching is not well directed, pupils lose focus and can become distracted. In these instances, pupils lack the motivation to challenge themselves or persist when learning becomes difficult.
- Pupils say that conduct, both in lessons and around the school, has improved markedly since last year. Staff also have recognised that behaviour has improved because leaders have insisted on a consistent approach to dealing with behaviour issues. This has resulted in fewer behaviour incidents this academic year. Pupils understand expectations and play cooperatively together in the outside area. They respond quickly to teachers' instructions. There are established routines which create an orderly environment. Parents agree that behaviour is well managed.
- Teachers are aware of pupils who find behaviour expectations difficult and provide appropriate support. As a result, there have been no fixed-term or permanent exclusions for the last three years. Leaders track behaviour incidents and are developing systems to identify patterns of behaviour so that actions can be put in place to mitigate these. An example of this has been the approaches used to develop pupils' self-esteem and promoting the importance of using 'kind words'. Pupils demonstrate these qualities in their daily interactions.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- There was an improvement in pupils' outcomes in 2018, both at key stage 1 and by the end of Reception. This follows several years of underachievement when pupils did not leave with the skills and knowledge needed for the next stage of their education.
- The proportions of children who reached a good level of development by the end of Reception rose sharply in 2018 and is now above the national average. However, boys and disadvantaged children performed below their peers. The proportion of children who exceed the standards expected for their age also improved. Children who leave the nursery provision are increasingly ready for school, but their progress stalls in Reception. Too few children currently in Reception are on track to reach age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics, because teaching is not directed well enough.
- The proportion of pupils who reached the standards expected for their age by the end of Year 1 improved in reading, writing and mathematics in 2018. This is now in line with typical standards seen nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who demonstrated a greater depth of understanding in reading was above the national average in 2018. However, this was not the case in writing and mathematics. These areas remain priorities for current pupils, who are not always supported well enough to demonstrate their understanding at this higher level.
- Current pupils in key stage 1 are continuing to make progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils do catch up with, and now often exceed, their peers. Leaders have identified pupils who have fallen behind and have directed them to additional interventions to remedy the gaps in their understanding.
- Over the last three years, the proportions of pupils meeting the required standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1 has been well below that in other schools nationally. Children in the early years are not developing their understanding of phonics quickly enough and this means that current pupils in Years 1 and 2 are not secure in this knowledge.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- The recently appointed early years leader has a clear vision and is aware of the strengths and weaknesses within this phase. She is eager to act on the areas identified as needing attention. She has begun to introduce ways of working to improve the quality of the provision on offer. Her previous role of managing the nursery resulted in the Nursery Year being stronger, but the legacy of weaker practice in Reception remains. This is reflected in the quality of teaching and in the opportunities that exist within the learning environment.
- Activities are often not purposeful enough, and adults are not clear about the links between activities and what they expect children to learn. This means that children do not make the progress that they need to, particularly disadvantaged children and boys. Teaching is not sharply enough focused on the skills that children need to accelerate their progress. This means that not all children are well prepared for key stage 1, because their skills remain too weak.

- The teaching of phonics is not strong enough. It is not matched carefully to children's needs, and the planned activities do not promote effective consolidation of understanding. There is low expectation and challenge to support children to learn letters and sounds. Leaders are not remedying this quickly enough.
- Parents are positive about the start their children receive to their school career. They are regularly invited into the school and can make an effective contribution to their child's learning through the online learning diaries. Key workers provide a valuable conduit for parents to be informed about their child's well-being and learning. Transition arrangements, including visits to pre-school providers and home visits, enable staff to have a secure understanding of children's needs before they begin in the early years.
- Children respond to established routines and settle into their day well. It is a happy and positive environment. Children want to engage in conversation with adults. The focus on children's speech and language development is reinforced through adults' conversations with children. Staff model patterns of speech and encourage children to reply and share their ideas. Adults provide strong support for children when they are in small teaching groups and promote effective turn-taking and sharing. Children want to be helpful, holding open doors for visitors and helping to tidy away their equipment.
- Safeguarding is effective and welfare requirements are met.

School details

Unique reference number	138849
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10002572

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	Infant
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	208
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Matthew Conway
Headteacher	Tracy Manning
Telephone number	01935474224
Website	www.penmillinfants.co.uk
Email address	office@penmill.somerset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Pen Mill Infant and Nursery Academy is an average-sized school that converted to academy status in 2012. The school runs a Nursery, which includes provision for two-year olds.
- The interim headteacher and deputy headteacher were appointed in September 2018, pending appointments of substantive post-holders.
- In the past academic year, there were substantive changes made to the governing body. A new governing body was formed in September 2018.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average.
- The majority of pupils are from a White British background. The school has 12 of the 17 ethnic groups. Over 20% of the pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across a range of subjects and age groups and scrutinised pupils' written work. Observations were conducted jointly with members of the leadership team.
- Meetings were held with members of the leadership team and representatives from the governing body and the board of trustees. In addition, inspectors met with curriculum and pastoral leaders.
- Inspectors met with pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, both formally and informally, to discuss their views about their experience of school.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour before school, in lessons, at lunchtime and breaktimes, and around the school site.
- Inspectors looked at the school's documentation, including the evaluation of the school's effectiveness and priorities for future improvement. Inspectors reviewed progress, behaviour and attendance information relating to current pupils, and governors' records.
- School policies relating to safeguarding, pupils' behaviour, the use of additional funding, including the pupil premium and the sport premium, and the curriculum were also scrutinised.
- Inspectors listened to a selection of pupils read.
- Inspectors considered the 17 responses to Ofsted's online survey Parent View. Inspectors also spoke with parents to seek their views of the school and the education their children receive.
- An inspector visited the breakfast club.

Inspection team

Sarah McGinnis, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Martin Greenwood

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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