

Ashtree Primary School and Nursery

Chertsey Rise, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 9JQ

Inspection dates

16–17 January 2018

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	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders do not evaluate the information they collect consistently or effectively enough. As a result, they are not always clear on emerging weaknesses or the precise impact of their work.
- Governors have not made sure that leaders are being sufficiently evaluative.
- Some teachers do not use assessment information consistently to set work that suitably challenges pupils, in particular the most able pupils. Consequently, pupils do not make the progress they should.
- Work in pupils' books shows there are inconsistencies in the rate of pupils' progress between classes and year groups.
- In some classes, teachers are not using feedback effectively. Where this is the case, pupils' progress is slower.
- Early years practitioners are not using observations of where children are at in their learning consistently to plan suitably challenging 'next steps' or activities.
- Leaders' work to improve pupils' mathematical fluency has not had sufficient time to have a positive impact on pupils' achievement. This is particularly the case in lower key stage 2.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 1 remains above the national average.
- Staff deal consistently with pupils' behaviour and have high expectations. Consequently, pupils' behaviour is good throughout the school.
- The Nursery provision provides a positive start for children, preparing them well for their first school experience.
- The teaching of phonics is effective. Pupils in the early years and in key stage 1 make good progress in their reading.
- Leaders have ensured that the school curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - leaders using the broad range of information available to them in an aligned way to gain an accurate understanding of the quality of education and standards at the school
 - leaders robustly monitoring and evaluating actions to ensure that they have an accurate view of the impact
 - using assessment information frequently and precisely to identify and act upon emerging weaknesses quickly.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that more pupils make good and better progress from their starting points by:
 - making good use of assessment information to set work which consistently matches individual pupils' needs
 - ensuring that the most able pupils receive suitably challenging work and are consistently moved on to the next stage of their learning in a timely way
 - consistently providing informative feedback for pupils so they know how to improve
 - making certain that the current systems for the development of mathematical fluency, reasoning and problem solving are used effectively in every year group.
- Improve the quality of the early years provision by using observations and 'next steps' for learning concisely to plan suitably challenging activities and tasks.

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

Requires improvement

- Leaders do not use the wealth of information they have available to them consistently to full effect. Some systems sit in isolation, which means that leaders are sometimes slow to identify emerging weaknesses. Consequently, the improvements they are making are not as rapid as they could be.
- Leaders have not monitored and evaluated all aspects of the school's provision consistently. Therefore, in some areas, they have an overgenerous view of the standards in the school.
- Leaders have not fully evaluated the impact of their spending of the pupil premium funding. The progress of pupils in receipt of this funding is too inconsistent. Leaders identified this themselves and are working effectively with the local authority as part of the 'diminishing the difference' project. Their evaluation of this work is showing a steadily improving picture.
- Leaders cannot fully attribute the positive progress made by pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities directly to the use of the SEN funding. However, inspection evidence indicates that the provision for the pupils is effective. Pupils' progress is closely monitored and external services are used well to set up personalised learning programmes.
- Leaders have worked well with external support from the local authority and 'Herts for learning'. They have listened carefully and taken advice on how to improve the teaching of writing and mathematics. This work has had a positive impact on improving pupils' achievement at key stage 2. In particular, it has improved progress rates in both subjects and brought writing attainment in line with the national average.
- Staff speak highly of the headteacher and senior leadership team. Leaders ensure that staff access training which links directly to improving their performance in areas that relate closely to the school's improvement plan. Consequently, staff are motivated, work hard and are having a steady impact on improving the identified areas of weakness.
- Senior leaders have provided precise guidance to subject leaders about their roles and responsibilities. All subject leaders have strong subject knowledge and have produced clear improvement plans, taking on increasing responsibility for the monitoring of their subject. Standards in the subjects where the systems have been fully implemented are showing improvement.
- Leaders use the physical education (PE) and sport premium funding particularly well. Pupils are active, enjoy sport and positively take part in PE lessons and school clubs which promote physical fitness and healthy, safe lifestyles. In 2017, an additional 100 pupils took part in lunchtime and after-school clubs.
- Leaders have implemented a curriculum that promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. For example, the school has a close link to a school in a Zimbabwean village. Alongside other aspects of the curriculum, such as religious education, pupils develop a greater interest in and respect for different cultures and

languages.

- Leaders promote pupils' awareness of fundamental British values well. Assemblies, lessons and displays around the school help pupils to have a clear understanding of how British values link to life in school. For example, pupils described the link between democracy and voting for the school council, and the rule of law by following the school rules. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Governance of the school

- Governors have not ensured that leaders provide high-quality evaluative information with a precise link between actions and impact. This means that despite asking probing questions and providing challenge to leaders, governors have an overgenerous view of the standards of education at the school.
- The quality assurance checks that governors undertake lack rigour. This is because, at times, governors have relied on external sources to complete checks on leaders' actions rather than checking for themselves. Consequently, there are occasions when leaders have not been held to account quickly enough. For example, in January 2017, it was highlighted by a local authority safeguarding review that the safer-recruitment training of leaders needed updating. Governors had not checked that leaders had actioned this recommendation. As a result, at the time of the inspection, the headteacher's and chair of governors' safer-recruitment certification had expired.
- Governors are committed to helping the school improve. They access appropriate training to ensure that they have the skills required to understand and carry out their statutory duties.
- Governors' minutes are of a high quality and reflect a strong focus on ensuring that children and pupils are safe and well cared for.
- The newly appointed safeguarding governor has a good understanding of his role and can explain clearly how he will carry out his statutory responsibilities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders foster a culture in which all members of the school community feel valued, safe and well cared for. Teachers use opportunities within the curriculum to develop pupils' awareness of safety regularly, enabling them to have a conscious awareness of personal safety in a vast array of situations. For example, Year 3 pupils were seen 'brainstorming' ways to make a gymnastics lesson safer.
- Pupils from a cross section of the school explained to inspectors how to keep themselves safe online. Throughout the inspection, pupils articulately explained their understanding of bullying and how effectively adults dealt with the rare occasions when bullying did occur.
- Staff responsible for the maintenance of the single central record undertake their duties with vigilance and rigour. They seek and take regular advice on how to maintain the record, ensuring that the latest government guidance and recommendations are adhered to.

- There is a clear system for staff appointments, which starts with the recruitment process and ends once the employee has started work and completed their induction. Records which track this process are of a high quality. Consequently, all statutory checks on employees are carried out to make sure they are safe to work with children.
- The system in place to phone home and check on children and pupils who do not arrive at school is watertight, recorded meticulously and effectively serves to mitigate the risk of children going missing from education.
- Leaders ensure that staff receive high-quality, regular safeguarding training. Staff use their knowledge and understanding of child protection effectively to identify children at risk of harm. Records which staff use to log their concerns are of a high quality. Leaders follow up concerns quickly and keep a range of detailed documents to evidence the actions they have taken to ensure that children and pupils are safe. At times, the complexity of the system leads to small administrative errors.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- In some classes, teachers do not consistently move pupils' learning on at a rate that would facilitate them making good and better progress over time. This is because the teachers do not use assessment information precisely enough. For example, some books in Years 3 and 4 show pupils repeating mathematical number skills for 'consolidation' when they had already demonstrated they were ready to apply the skills in reasoning or problem solving.
- Teachers' feedback varies in quality and is used inconsistently. Pupils in upper key stage 2 benefit from informative feedback which helps them reflect on their 'next steps'. Pupils respond positively to this. Teachers provide them with suitable time to address the feedback and, as a result, pupils make more rapid progress. Where this is not the case, pupils' progress is slower.
- Some teachers are not making sure that they set work which requires the most able pupils to think deeply. Where this is the case, work is too easy or teachers do not move pupils on quickly enough to more difficult challenges, slowing the rate of progress these pupils make in lessons.
- Most teachers use their good subject knowledge during lessons to identify pupils' misconceptions and skilfully ask questions to draw out pupils' understanding, helping them to identify and correct their own mistakes.
- In the best examples, teachers were observed teaching mathematics in a way which effectively developed pupils' conceptual understanding. For example, in a Year 2 mathematics lesson, pupils were introduced to column addition, using an easy to follow practical approach. This helped pupils to visualise the concept and quickly increased their fluency and accuracy of using column addition to add two, two-digit numbers. Inspectors' review of pupils' work showed a continuously improving picture of teachers applying this method with positive effect. Pupils' books show how pupils make better, often good, progress through key stage 1 and upper key stage 2.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour, as do teaching assistants. This leads to pupils having good attitudes to learning and being focused and engaged in lessons.

- Teaching assistants are well trained and have clearly defined roles. Teachers, on the whole, deploy additional adults effectively to support the learning of identified pupils, including less-able pupils or those in receipt of the pupil premium funding. As a result, the progress of these groups of pupils has improved, although not rapidly.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff and pupils share positive relationships, which foster pupils' care and consideration for others. This level of mutual respect means that pupils trust the adults to take care of them. Adults promote clear messages about bullying and personal safety. Pupils, in the form of 'digital leaders', also take an active role in educating others about how to stay safe online. Consequently, pupils feel safe and, importantly, know how to keep themselves safe.
- Leaders have established a variety of pupil ambassador roles which develop pupils' sense of responsibility. For example, the sports ambassadors explained proudly how they organised an annual sports festival to promote fitness and healthy lifestyles. Also, the reading ambassadors are excellent role models who read with younger children and help to promote a love of reading, which is seen across the school.
- Pupils are proud of their school and have a strong sense of belonging. Teachers and teaching assistants ensure that displays around the school provide wide and varied examples of how pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is developed.
- Leaders showcase pupils' achievements both inside and outside school. In particular, pupils' self-esteem is raised through participation in the 'Ashtree achievers hall of fame'. All pupils are encouraged to write out 'leaves of achievements' they are proud of outside school. Pupils write their achievements on ash leaves and add them to an ever-growing display of an ash tree in the school hall.
- Leaders have effectively established full 'wrap around care'. Families receive timely and effective support from a range of external agencies. Trained counsellors link with family workers to provide enhanced support and communication between home and school. Consequently, parents and carers spoke highly of the school, describing it 'like a family' and strongly praising the pastoral support they receive.
- A very small proportion of parents felt that bullying was not dealt with as effectively as it could be. Leaders' monitoring and evaluation of reported bullying incidents lack rigour. Therefore, they were unable to show precisely how effective their work is.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are polite, kind and confident. Adults' consistent approach to behaviour management results in pupils knowing expectations and demonstrating good behaviour in lessons, around the school building and at lunchtime and playtime.

- Staff are positive role models and show nurture and patience to the few children and pupils who struggle to manage their own behaviour. Inspectors saw this approach being used effectively to help pupils calm down quickly and return to their learning.
- Disruption to lessons is rare. Pupils apply themselves positively to their learning and are motivated to succeed. This is because leaders have created an environment where pupils recognise the importance of trying hard. For example, a group of Year 6 pupils said, 'We go by our motto: high expectations equal high outcomes, low aspirations equal low outcomes. This means if you aim high and put in the effort, you will be rewarded later when you leave school with better opportunities.'
- A lack of rigour around the monitoring of pupils' attendance means that despite improvements, overall attendance still remains just below the national average. There has been an improvement in attendance and reduction in persistent absence over the last year, both of which are now much closer to the national averages. Leaders have established a number of systems which promote the importance of good attendance. The hotly contested 'attendance of the week trophies' motivate pupils to attend more regularly.
- Leaders' work to introduce additional pre-school clubs has had a significant impact on the improvement of pupils' punctuality.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' progress has improved over the last year in reading, writing and mathematics.
- While the school met the government's coasting definition in the three-year period 2014, 2015 and 2016, it is anticipated that this will no longer be the case following the 2017 outcomes.
- Pupils made positive progress through key stage 1 in 2017 but this rate of progress slowed as they moved through lower key stage 2. Pupils' rates of progress increased again in Year 6. Overall, outcomes are not good because pupils make inconsistent progress and could do even better.
- In 2017, attainment for Year 6 pupils in mathematics was below average. However, leaders have made positive inroads into improving the standards of mathematics in other parts of the school. For example, attainment for pupils in key stage 1 was above the national average. The teaching of some areas of mathematics is not fully implemented in every year group to ensure that all pupils are making good and better progress from their starting points.
- Most-able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, particularly in key stage 2, are not consistently making the progress they should. This is partly because work sometimes does not challenge them.
- The school is part of the 'diminishing the difference' project, which is having a positive impact, particularly in the Year 4 classes where it is a focus. While there are other examples of disadvantaged pupils diminishing the difference between themselves and their peers, this is not consistently the case in all classes or subjects.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities generally make good progress overall, and benefit from well-thought-through intervention programmes and specialist teaching to support their learning. Nonetheless, leaders' reviews of pupils' progress and SEN

support plans and interventions are not evaluated sharply enough. Consequently, few pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are making rapid progress.

- Building on their good grounding in phonics in the early years, pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 develop their knowledge of phonics well. They use their knowledge confidently when reading to sound out unfamiliar or 'tricky' words and in writing to support their spelling. By the end of Year 2, pupils' attainment in reading and writing is above the national average.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Children's progress in their learning is not regularly captured by all adults, particularly in Reception. Consequently, the evidence that shows how well children are learning across all of the aspects of the early learning curriculum is sometimes limited.
- Staff do not always identify children's 'next steps' clearly. This means that, at times, children repeat activities they have already shown they can do, slowing the rate of progress they make. This is especially the case for the most able children.
- The Nursery and Reception leaders work effectively together to ensure that the measures of children's knowledge and skills are accurate at the point of transfer. Appropriate arrangements are in place to moderate assessments. This system ensures that those children working below expected levels are well supported to make positive progress from their starting points.
- A high proportion of children enter the Nursery with speech and language skills below those typical for their age. Through targeted support and specialist speech and language assistants, many children make accelerated progress. The proportions of children who leave Reception with expected speech and language skills is in line with national averages.
- Although the proportions of children achieving a good level of development fluctuate from year to year, on the whole, the percentage is broadly in line with the national average. Therefore, children generally leave Reception with the reading, writing and mathematical skills and knowledge they need to be ready for the Year 1 curriculum.
- Children's behaviour is good. Staff make sure that the learning environment is safe, supportive and nurturing. Adults set consistently high expectations, have clearly identified routines and motivate pupils to behave well and develop a keen interest in learning. Children feel safe to 'have a go' and quickly develop self-help skills, such as putting on their coats and shoes, selecting appropriate equipment and tidying up after themselves.

School details

Unique reference number	117352
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10041795

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

Type of school	Nursery and primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	455
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	William Spicer
Headteacher	Elizabeth Kirwan
Telephone number	01438 351090
Website	www.ashtree.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@ashtree.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–15 May 2014

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized school.
- Around a quarter of the pupils come from a range of multi-ethnic groups. The proportion of children and pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- Leaders appointed a new assistant headteacher in September 2017.
- The proportion of children and pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium funding is above the national average.
- The percentage of children and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is approximately half the national average. The proportion of pupils who have education, health and care plans is below the national average.
- School leaders are currently working with 'Herts for Learning'. As well as being part of the 'diminishing the difference' project, focusing on the current Year 4 cohort, termly

visits are conducted by the improvement partner.

- A local authority safeguarding review was brokered in January 2017 and additional support is also being received from English and mathematics advisory teachers.
- Governors have responsibility for the on-site Nursery provision for three- and four-year-olds.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school meets the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 2 academic performance in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all classes and, in some classes, more than once. Joint observations were undertaken with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. The headteacher and assistant headteacher also completed a book scrutiny of pupils' work alongside the inspection team.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the governing body, senior and middle leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and the specialist special needs teacher. Further meetings were held with a representative group of teaching assistants and the school's subject leaders, including the well-being lead and the personnel, social and health education coordinator. The lead inspector also held telephone conversations with a representative from the 'Herts for Learning' service, the safeguarding governor and the chair of the governing body's standards committee.
- Inspectors reviewed 42 responses to Ofsted's free-text service alongside 46 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Inspectors also evaluated 24 responses from staff and 11 responses to the pupils' questionnaire.
- In addition to observing pupils' behaviour in lessons, inspectors also observed pupils before school, at playtime and lunchtime and during the after-school dance club.
- Inspectors evaluated the monitoring files relating to teaching, learning and assessment, attendance data, governors' minutes, support for newly qualified teachers, school development and improvement plans, leaders' self-evaluation, external reviews and reports relating to the monitoring of school standards, support plans for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, and leaders' tracking of pupils' progress.

Inspection team

Kerry Grubb-Moore, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Paul Andrew	Ofsted Inspector
Henry Weir	Ofsted Inspector

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