

Featherstone Wood Primary School

Featherston Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 9PP

Inspection dates

5 to 6 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	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

- Pupils have not made enough progress in recent years. Attainment at and progress in key stage 2 have declined over the last three years. Attainment is below the national average at the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- The leadership of the school has had several recent changes. There has not yet been the necessary impact on improving teaching and learning as teachers have also changed.
- Leaders have put in place a wide curriculum with a focus on developing both subject-specific knowledge and skills for learning. Although pupils work hard in their lessons, the activities they are given do not always challenge them or make them think.
- The quality of teaching is not consistently good. Some teachers do not have high enough expectations or awareness of what standards pupils should be reaching.
- The teaching of phonics and early reading is inconsistent across the school. It does not always support pupils to apply their knowledge of sounds.
- The early years' provision has dedicated adult-led times for children to develop their early reading, writing and mathematics, but these are not developed enough elsewhere in the provision. Children's play does not link to topics chosen, and activities provided do not give them enough awareness of the wider world.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils' personal and social development is well provided for. Activities to promote mental well-being are a core part of daily life for pupils.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils behave well both in lessons and around the school site. Pupils who have previously struggled with their behaviour are well supported to take part in school life.
- Senior leaders have put in place high-quality interventions to support those who need additional help. Families are well supported by teachers and leaders to help their children. Disadvantaged pupils do not achieve lower standards than their peers.
- Staff and governors are passionate about improving the school. Governors are reflective about their work and have sought external advice and support for the school where needed.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and, consequently, outcomes, by:
 - ensuring that teachers have consistently high and appropriate expectations across the school
 - teachers enabling pupils to be engaged in and challenged by their work
 - reviewing and improving the quality of phonics teaching.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - developing the leadership skills of middle leaders and senior leaders who are new to post
 - enhancing these leaders' abilities to improve others' teaching and learning
 - ensuring that all initiatives are evaluated and adjusted as appropriate, including in cultural provision.
- Improve teaching and outcomes in the early years by:
 - raising expectations of what children can do and achieve
 - extending opportunities for children to develop their understanding of the wider world
 - enhancing the quality of provision for children's activities when they are choosing what to do, both inside and outside, including:
 - clearer links to topics being covered to develop vocabulary, knowledge and understanding
 - further opportunities for early reading and writing development.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, several members of the leadership team have gained promotion into other roles. As of this academic year, this left a leadership team new to their specific roles within the school. Recently, staff absence, combined with the new leadership team and new teachers starting, has left the school vulnerable.
- As a result, there has not been the support for some teachers to develop their practice. Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning across the school is not currently good enough. Senior leaders have focused their efforts on improving teaching where there were significant behaviour issues and for those who were new to teaching.
- Leaders' actions have not secured improvements in pupils' progress and attainment. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard at the end of key stage 2 has fallen over the last three years, with progress in 2018 from key stage 1 to key stage 2 not being strong enough in reading and mathematics. Leaders have not addressed this downward pattern, and so the school is not providing a good quality of education.
- Middle leaders are enthusiastic and have developed their subject leadership with the support of local authority advisers. However, they have not yet had enough impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning of colleagues across the school.
- The assistant headteacher with responsibility for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is new to post. He has built on existing systems to ensure plans for interventions are clear. There are clear systems for measuring the impact of interventions, but these are not yet embedded. Provision for pupils with SEND is comprehensive, and they are well supported.
- The senior leadership team has actively welcomed support and development from the local authority improvement partner and advisers for the early years, English and mathematics. Leaders are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and know that improvements need to be made to the teaching to enable outcomes to rise.
- Senior leaders have recently revised their self-evaluation and improvement planning in partnership with the headteacher of a local school.
- Leaders have put in place a wide curriculum. Pupils have opportunities to read and write in many subject areas. However, the teaching of the specific subject skills that leaders expect is not as good as it could be.
- The pupil premium funding is used effectively. A larger-than-average proportion of pupils are eligible for this and, consequently, the support runs across the school. This support includes additional staff, targeted intervention, both pastoral and academic, and enrichment to the curriculum by specialist music tuition. In 2018, disadvantaged pupils achieved above other pupils at the end of key stage 2.
- The sport premium funding is used effectively. Fully funded lunchtime and after-school clubs are provided and are all oversubscribed. Specialist coaches have supported the development of staff skills within the school. Membership of a local sports partnership has enabled pupils to take part in a wide range of activities, from gymnastic events through to dragon-boat racing.

- Leaders have worked hard with the parental community to enable them both to support their children and for their children to attend school regularly. Some parents still have a negative perception of the amount of support their children receive, particularly in relation to bullying, support for special educational needs and communication between teachers and parents. During the inspection, these worries were followed through in detail and were not found to be key areas of concern.

Governance of the school

- Governors are passionate about the school. They are regularly involved in its work. They are knowledgeable about its strengths. They monitor the use of resources carefully and ask challenging questions.
- With the recent reduction in leadership capacity and the downward trend in the performance of pupils at the end of key stage 2, governors are rightly reflective about their work. They have sought external support from the local authority to help them with bringing on new leaders and improvement planning.
- Governors ensure that all their statutory duties are fulfilled. All appropriate checks are made on adults who are regularly in the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding pupils is of the utmost priority in the school. All staff are trained and have good knowledge of how to keep pupils safe.
- Leaders and staff use the school's electronic system to record any incidents, and patterns are quickly recognised. Where staff have concerns about pupils' welfare, these are quickly and appropriately followed up by leaders. Staff are well informed of what they need to know to support the pupils in their care.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning across the school is inconsistent. There are strengths in every year group, but also too many areas where pupils' learning is not well provided for.
- Activities are, on occasion, not matched well to the learning intention. Sometimes too much support is provided and sometimes there is not enough. Not all teachers have high enough expectations or understanding of what pupils should be achieving at their current age. Pupils are well behaved and work diligently on whatever they are given to do, but on occasion this does not challenge them appropriately or provide them opportunities to think for themselves.
- There has been a recent focus on improving the quality of pupils' reading. Leaders report that their own assessments show greater progress in reading than in writing and mathematics. Pupils who were heard read were able to use their knowledge of phonics and enjoyed reading. However, the teaching of phonics is inconsistent. In more than one class, pupils were not supported adequately in how to turn their sounds into

writing. Pupils have access to a library to borrow books but are sometimes not directed well to books about particular areas of interest or that are sufficiently challenging.

- The teaching of writing leads to extended pieces of work. These are sometimes of much higher quality than work elsewhere, whether drafting in English or writing across the curriculum. Teachers do not have the same expectations of quality and quantity from pupils in every subject.
- In mathematics, there has been a recent emphasis on problem-solving and reasoning. This has been most effective in the upper years. However, in other years, pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop the fluency they need in basic arithmetic before attempting these problems. Mathematics work in the lower part of the school is often too easy.
- The curriculum gives pupils opportunities to learn about many subjects. The quality of the French teaching is of a high standard, with pupils demonstrating accurate spoken and written language. All teachers are trained to use yoga and mindfulness activities with their classes. However, the sequence of teaching appropriate skills in subjects such as history and science is not as well developed as in English.
- Some pupils with SEND receive additional teaching and support. This is of a good quality, although the impact is as fully measured as it might be. Pupils who have behavioural or emotional needs are well supported by the provision of a nurture group in the afternoons. There are clear plans for pupils to reintegrate into class after time in this group, and many have already successfully made this transition.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The relationship between pupils of different ages is strong. Clearly defined 'buddy systems' mean that older pupils help the younger ones at playtimes. They also have separate 'reading buddies', where older and younger pupils share books together.
- The links between different year groups help develop fundamental British values, such as respect for others. Pupils do not tolerate discrimination. They are highly supportive of each other and of those with additional needs.
- All of Year 6 pupils are trained as peer mediators. They take turns to support other pupils to resolve minor disputes on the playground. They talk positively about how this has enabled them to gain confidence. Other pupils are also given leadership positions, such as sports' ambassadors, running activities on the playground, and yoga leaders.
- Pupils are confident to try different activities. They will persevere with tasks, even when they are tricky.
- Pupils feel safe. Parents spoken to in the course of the inspection agreed that their children were safe in school. Pupils know who they can talk to if they are worried about anything.
- Leaders have chosen to put an emphasis on 'mindfulness' as key to much of the work to develop pupils' personal development. All classes regularly take part in yoga,

meditation and/or breathing exercises. Staff refer to these when they are talking to pupils about how to keep calm or deal with situations that make the pupils feel upset.

- Leaders and teachers worked together to research the benefits of mindfulness and how to go about introducing it. They identified that the end of lunchtime was a difficult time for many pupils and shortened the time outside by 10 minutes. This 10 minutes is now spent completing 'mandala' patterns. Pupils are sure that this keeps them calm but are not fully clear about the purpose of completing the patterns.
- Pupils' emotional development is also supported by the emphasis on skills for learning, such as confidence and teamworking. Pupils' moral development is enhanced by the religious education curriculum. Their cultural development is provided for, with a variety of books and topics studied across the curriculum, but this is not necessarily planned directly.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are well behaved. They are polite and welcoming to visitors. In class, they listen attentively and do tasks that they are asked to. As they move around the school, they are calm, sensible and quiet.
- There are a number of pupils who have presented highly challenging behaviour in the past. These are now well managed by the provision and support on offer. There are still incidents, particularly in less-structured moments, but these are dealt with quickly, effectively and appropriately by staff.
- Although the overall absence level has remained broadly constant over the last two years, the percentage of pupils who are persistently absent is much reduced. This is a result of the leadership team's high focus on working with families who need to improve their children's attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- In recent years, outcomes have been too low. In 2018, pupils' progress from key stage 1 to key stage 2 was well below the national average in reading and below average in mathematics.
- The proportion of pupils achieving at least the expected standard at the end of key stage 2 in all of reading, writing and mathematics has declined over the last three years and was below the national average in 2018. Too few most-able pupils who had high attainment at the end of key stage 1 reached the higher standard in reading and mathematics.
- The proportion of pupils achieving at least the expected standard at the end of key stage 1 was also below the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check is also below the national average. However, by the end of Year 2, virtually all pupils meet the expected standard in this check.
- At the end of the early years, the proportion of pupils achieving a good level of

development was also slightly below the national average.

- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well. In 2017, at key stage 2, there was only a small gap between the achievement of this group and that of the whole cohort. In 2018, this gap had entirely closed, with disadvantaged pupils achieving better than the rest of the cohort in each of reading, writing and mathematics. This was also the case in writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1.
- Leaders have begun to put in place moderation sessions with a local school to support teacher assessment and understanding of what the expected standard for each age group looks like. The school's own assessments and pupils' books currently indicate that most pupils are making some progress but not all.
- Pupils' books show strongest progress in mathematics and writing development in the upper year groups. However, there are not yet enough pupils at the expected standards for their age.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Provision for the early years is not currently of a good enough standard. The leadership does not make best use of the staff and resources available.
- With support from the local authority, leaders have put in place a system of regular small-group work focused on key areas of learning in Reception. These are effective at developing the focus for the session. However, the teaching in whole-class sessions is not always pitched at the right level for children's abilities, particularly in early reading and writing. As a consequence, learning opportunities are missed.
- Nursery children have whole-class sessions to develop their sound and number knowledge. However, across the entire early years, there is no consistency in how these early skills are taught.
- Children have regular opportunities to choose their own activities. Where adults engage with the children in these, their questioning is of a good standard. However, the activities and resources available for the children are limited. There are very few opportunities for children to develop their early reading, writing or mathematics.
- Leaders encourage the children to choose their own topics as a basis for learning, and they vote on what these should be. However, this limits the opportunities for staff to extend children's understanding of the wider world. There are not enough occasions for children to learn about other cultures or knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Opportunities for children to develop wider vocabulary and understanding linked to topics through role and small world play are limited.
- Children with SEND are well supported by the provision of additional adult support and individually planned activities where appropriate.
- Routines are well established in the early years. Children behave well. They are willing to tidy up after themselves.

School details

Unique reference number	131505
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10058722

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	193
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jacky Nicholls
Headteacher	Louise Shuttleworth
Telephone number	01438 235 550
Website	www.featherstonewood.herts.sch.uk
Email address	office@featherstonewood.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 March 2015

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average sized primary school.
- There are more pupils than is average who are eligible for pupil premium funding.
- There are more pupils than is average with SEND.
- The school currently receives informal support from a local primary school. This is soon to become a formal support partnership brokered by the local authority.
- A separately registered and inspected pre-school, 'Bunnies', operates on the school site.
- The school provides its own breakfast club.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed learning in every class. Some of these observations were undertaken alongside members of the senior leadership team.
- A wide range of pupils' workbooks were looked at by the inspection team.
- The inspection team met with representatives from the local governing body and the local authority adviser. They met with senior leaders, subject leaders and new teachers. The 21 responses to the staff survey were considered.
- Groups of children met with inspectors. Inspectors also spoke to pupils informally in lessons and at playtimes.
- The inspection team scrutinised the school's website and a range of documents, including assessment information, the improvement plan and the school's self-evaluation.
- Pupils read to inspectors and talked about their reading preferences.
- The 45 total responses in this academic year and the 23 free-text responses made by parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, were considered. The inspection team also spoke to some parents before school.

Inspection team

Tessa Holledge, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Shân Oswald

Ofsted Inspector

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