

Pixies Hill Primary School

Hazeldell Road, Hemel Hempstead, HP1 2BY

Inspection dates 11–12 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Since the time of the previous inspection there have been sustained improvements in all aspects of the school's work. It is well placed to continue to develop at a good pace.
- The headteacher and other school leaders work very well together. With the full support of the staff they have ensured that the quality of teaching, achievement, pupils' behaviour and leadership are now good and improving.
- Teaching is consistently good and there are examples of outstanding practice. This is ensuring that all pupils learn successfully.
- Teachers have high expectations of their pupils and ensure that pupils' learning is well supported in vibrant, well-resourced and conducive classroom environments.
- Pupils achieve well. From their average starting points when they join Reception they make good progress to reach above and sometime well-above average standards at the end of Year 6.
- Pupils feel safe, behave well, attend regularly and have very positive attitudes to learning.
- Governors have well developed systems to check the work of the school. They provide leaders with strong challenge and support.
- Most of the parents who responded to the online survey, who spoke to inspectors or who wrote in, were highly positive. They commended the improvements made since the previous inspection and would recommend this school to other parents.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement and teaching are not yet outstanding.
- The quality of marking and feedback it is not yet consistently strong enough to help pupils learn from their mistakes and make rapid progress.
- Occasionally, when pupils have fully grasped a topic they are not given more difficult work to challenge them and deepen their understanding.
- Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to practise and develop their writing and mathematical skills across the subjects.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 13 lessons taught by 10 teachers. They also observed small-group support sessions. Six of these observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, staff, groups of pupils and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documentation including teachers' planning, the school's analysis of its strengths and weaknesses and resulting development plans, information on pupils' attainment and progress, records of the monitoring of teaching and governing body meetings, safeguarding documentation and samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read, spoke with them about their learning and behaviour and reviewed the work in their books.
- Inspectors considered the 40 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and 18 responses to the staff questionnaire. They also spoke informally to parents as they brought and collected their children from school, and considered letters and e-mails sent to the inspection team.

Inspection team

David Radomsky, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Helen Woodhouse

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Pixies Hill is an average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding which in this school supports pupils known to be eligible for free school meals) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The headteacher took up post shortly before the previous inspection. Since then there has been much staff turnover, including the appointment of new senior and middle leaders, some as recently as January of this year.
- In December 2013, the school achieved the 'Values Education' quality mark. This means that pupils are regularly taught values that develop their social and relationship skills.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of pupils making rapid progress by ensuring that:
 - when pupils have understood their work they are given harder activities to stretch their learning further
 - marking always tells pupils how to improve their work and that they regularly have time to respond to their teachers' comments in their books
 - pupils have more opportunities to practise their writing skills in subjects other than English
 - pupils have more opportunities to apply their mathematical skills, including problem solving, in real life situations.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- All pupils, including the most-able, make good and sometimes rapid progress during their time at the school. This is because learning is well planned to challenge pupils of all abilities and because pupils have good attitudes to learning. They work hard and want to succeed.
- Children enter Reception with skills that are typically those expected for their age. They make good progress as they are well taught in a stimulating learning environment. The proportion of children leaving Reception with a good level of development and being well prepared for Year 1 is above that found nationally.
- Rates of progress across Key Stage 1 are good and improving. The current Year 2 class have achieved standards in reading, writing and mathematics which are above those found nationally, including at the higher levels.
- Progress across Key Stage 2 has improved and is now good with increasing numbers of pupils making rapid progress. In 2013, Year 6 pupils attained significantly above the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics and above average at the higher levels, significantly so in mathematics. The current cohort has made faster progress, especially in reading and writing and is expected to attain high standards.
- Pupils' reading skills are well developed. From the start, Reception children understand the letters and the sounds that they make (phonics) and the more-able children write 'blurbs' about the books that they have read. The proportion of pupils in Year 1 reaching the expected level in the national phonics check is consistently above average. Reading is given a high profile across the school, and the newly stocked libraries provide pupils with quality texts that they enjoy reading at school and at home. Any pupils experiencing difficulties are given additional adult support. As a result, pupils become competent and enthusiastic readers, reading a wide range of authors.
- Pupils write well. From Reception children are actively encouraged to write frequently. For instance, children were seen writing postcards describing their recent trip to see mini beasts. Pupils have clear targets and guidance for developing their writing skills and because they read frequently, they continually expand their vocabulary. They develop their grammatical and spelling skills well and competently write for a range of purposes. The most-able pupils are increasingly reaching the higher levels. Pupils do not, however, have many opportunities to practise their writing in other subjects and this limits some pupils from making rapid progress.
- Progress in mathematics is good as it is well taught. Pupils are not always given many opportunities to apply their mathematical skills across other subjects. As a result, in some year groups pupils do not make the rapid progress of which they are capable. The more-able mathematicians at the top of the school however, are sufficiently challenged so a higher than average proportion attain the highest level 6 in the national tests.
- All groups of pupils, including those who are disabled and those who have special educational needs, are well supported and make similar good progress to their peers.
- The pupil premium is used well to help individual pupils make good progress. It pays for extra tuition opportunities and for personal development, such as residential team building trips. In 2013, the attainment of the few eligible Year 6 pupils was the equivalent of two months below their peers in reading, one year below in writing and four months below in mathematics. Eligible

pupils making expected progress from their Year 2 starting points in reading and mathematics was well above other pupils in the school and similar in writing. There are no eligible pupils in the current Year 6 class.

The quality of teaching is good

- The work seen in pupils' books, as well as the frequent checks carried out by the school's leaders and other inspection evidence demonstrates that teaching has improved notably since the previous inspection. It is now consistently good with some outstanding practice. This has ensured increasingly higher achievement.
- In Reception, teachers and teaching assistants provide a good range of stimulating activities indoors and out. Children learn to develop their learning and social skills quickly because routines are well established and activities are well organised to arouse interest and encourage cooperation and enquiry.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together. This ensures that planned activities cater for the range of pupils' abilities including the most-able. Pupils needing additional help, such as those with special educational needs, are given well-targeted support so that all can learn well and make good progress. Additionally teachers and teaching assistants work hard together to create vibrant learning environments which enthuse pupils to learn. Pupils feel valued as their work is displayed and celebrated. They are helped to learn well through the guidance displayed in the classroom as well as through displays of key vocabulary, definitions, grammatical guidance, mathematical operations, class libraries and, for example, imaginative play areas in the younger years.
- Teachers have consistently high expectations of behaviour and work. As a result, pupils start learning diligently as soon as instructed to do so, whether in groups, pairs or individually. They produce a good quantity of quality work in the time given.
- At times, pupils' progress can slow down when they have fully grasped and understood a topic and are not provided with a harder activity to stretch them further to reach the next level of understanding of which they are capable.
- Books show that pupils have made good and in some cases rapid progress since the start of the year. Marking is frequent and the quality of feedback and advice given has improved significantly since the introduction of the new marking policy in January. There are still some inconsistencies remaining, however, so pupils do not always know how to improve their work or deepen their understanding. Pupils do not always have enough time to respond to written comments. This slows their progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite, helpful and welcoming to visitors. Their positive attitudes are nurtured well through the 'value' of the month which is discussed in assemblies and reinforced in lessons.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning, which is seen in their strong levels of participation and collaboration with their classmates during lessons and their involvement in other activities.
- Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school. They therefore arrive punctually and attendance is consistently above average. The relationships between pupils and with their teachers and teaching assistants are positive and respectful.

- In Reception, children follow established routines, play and share equipment selflessly. For example, one boy allowed a girl to try out flying his newly made paper airplane before he had tested it himself.
- Pupils say that there has been some inappropriate behaviour displayed by a few pupils at lunch times. School leaders have begun to address this issue, including by putting in additional senior leader supervision and by acquiring more playground equipment to keep pupils gainfully occupied at lunchtimes. Leaders are planning to do more work on the `respect' value so that strong relationships and good behaviours occur consistently at all times of the day.
- Pupils welcome the many opportunities offered to them to take responsibility, such as serving on the school council, writing and editing the `Pixies Mag' and raising funds for charity.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils and their parents confirm that pupils feel safe in school. Pupils are confident that if they are experiencing any difficulties or have any concerns there are caring adults who they can approach for help.
- Pupils are aware of the various types of bullying, including cyber bullying. They know how to stay safe, for instance, when using the internet or fireworks and when cycling on the road. Bullying is uncommon and pupils are confident that when it occurs, it is dealt with promptly and effectively.

The leadership and management are good

- All leaders, including the governors, with clear direction from the headteacher, have high expectations of all staff and pupils. Rigorous systems have been introduced to frequently check on all aspects of the school's work together with high levels of accountability. These, combined with a well-targeted teacher training programme, have ensured that the school has improved rapidly since the time of the previous inspection to being good and improving in all aspects of its work. Morale is high and all are striving towards outstanding.
- All recommendations from the previous report have been successfully implemented and the school is the best it has been for a long time. Teaching, achievement, behaviour and leadership are all good now and improving. Pupils therefore leave the school well prepared academically and socially for secondary education.
- Leaders have created an ethos where all staff are valued and pupils can thrive. All leaders, including subject and the Early Years Foundation Stage leader, work collaboratively with teachers and teaching assistants across the year groups. All contribute to the self-evaluations of the aspects that others lead. Staff share expertise, agree priorities for development and identify training needs. Leaders subsequently create sharply focused improvement plans which are reviewed regularly. Each leader learns from best practice in other local schools and from consultants. They, in turn, train their school colleagues, helping all to gain good subject knowledge across the curriculum. These processes have helped secure the good rate of ongoing improvements in teaching, achievement and behaviour.
- The subjects make learning engaging and fun and encourage pupils to develop good attitudes to learning, behaviour and safety. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through many additional opportunities, such as visits to a Tudor house, visits to places of worship, samba drumming workshops, visitors such as theatre companies and opportunities to reflect in assemblies on a wide range of values.

- Subject leaders have been planning for the implementation of the new national curriculum and teaching of the first topics is being piloted this term. They have identified that as they continue to plan for next academic year they need to plan for more opportunities for pupils to write across the subjects and for pupils to apply their mathematical skills across a range of real life situations so that more can make rapid progress.
- Leaders scrutinise work and information on pupils' progress frequently. Senior leaders meet with each teacher and teaching assistant half termly to discuss the progress of every pupil. Any pupil who is falling behind is given additional support so that they can quickly catch up with their classmates. This demonstrates the school's commitment to equality of opportunity.
- The local authority has provided effective support to school leaders and has helped them to secure good teaching and achievement.
- The primary school sports funding is being used well. The new subject leader and school sports coach are receiving training from experts from the local sports partnership to improve their skills. In addition, the school has purchased playground equipment to encourage physical activities such as basketball equipment, space hoppers and mini golf. New clubs offering, for instance, netball and cup stacking have also broadened the offer. All these opportunities have increased pupils' participation and are ensuring their physical wellbeing.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Since the previous inspection the governing body has improved. There has been a sharpened focus on holding school leaders to account for ensuring school improvement and in developing their own skills. Current governors bring a wide range of expertise including from the world of education. They are well trained in understanding pupils' progress data and know how well pupils are performing in relation to pupils nationally. In addition, each class has a link governor who moves up the year groups with them. Governors visit their class on a termly basis, sitting in on lessons, talking to staff and pupils and periodically attend their class's pupil progress meetings. Governors recently consulted with parents at a breakfast to which all parents were invited. With this level of monitoring and through the headteacher's reports they are very well aware of the quality of teaching, pupils' progress and their behaviour. Governors use the headteacher's appraisal to set clear expectations for improved teaching and achievement and these expectations drive the performance management of teachers. Governors are clear that only teachers whose pupils make good progress will be rewarded. Governors check carefully on the use of additional funds, pupil premium funding for example, and ensure good value for money. They also check that safeguarding requirements are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	117256
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	442028

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	201
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jean Garner
Headteacher	Martin Smith
Date of previous school inspection	30 January 2013
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