

Holywell Primary School

Tolpits Lane, Watford, WD18 6LL

Inspection dates 09–10 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Achievement is good and improving because teaching is consistently good with some aspects that are outstanding.
- The secure improvements made to the quality of teaching and achievements are a direct result of the very strong leadership and management of the headteacher. His exemplary leadership, based on a thorough analysis of the school's work, has set a very clear direction.
- A relentless focus on improving teaching has successfully reversed the history of underachievement. Pupils read fluently, with understanding and enjoyment.
- Pupil behaviour is outstanding. Attendance has significantly improved and the school works very well with parents and families to help them support their children's learning.
- The school is using additional funding effectively to raise standards, particularly for pupils eligible for the pupil premium.
- Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds enjoy an imaginative range of learning opportunities which are very well matched to their differing aptitudes and needs. Learning is well supported by trips out and visitors to the school, including artists, musicians and sports coaches.
- Staff have many opportunities for training, research and development. An increasing number of staff now exercise leadership.
- Leaders and managers at all levels, with good support from the governing body, are firmly focused on improving the outcomes of all pupils.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Progress in writing lags behind that in reading because not enough opportunities are given to pupils to use and apply their writing in other subjects.
- Although marking is regular, insufficient attention to following up the guidance given means that not all pupils have time to reflect on or to improve their learning.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 33 part lessons, including three joint observations with the headteacher.
- The inspectors listened to pupils from different year groups read, and talked with them and other groups of pupils about their lessons and school life. Inspectors spoke to pupils at break and lunch times. The work in pupils' books was checked.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and subject leaders and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors held discussions with the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documentation relating to pupils' progress and to school management, including the arrangements to ensure safeguarding.
- The inspectors took account of questionnaires completed by staff and outcomes from the school's own consultations with parents as well as responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).

Inspection team

Susan Thomas-Pounce, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jennifer Barker	Additional Inspector
Alan Jarvis	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Holywell Primary School is significantly larger than the average primary school. The large majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, who speak English as an additional language. A small number of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs at the school action stage is well-above average. The proportion of those supported at school action plus or with statements of special educational needs is average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium, which includes those known to be eligible for free school meals, those in the care of the local authority and those with a parent in the armed services, is higher than the national average.
- The school meets the current floor standards, which set the government's minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- A very high proportion of pupils enter or leave the school at times other than the start of the Reception Year. For example, during the current year, over 100 pupils have joined the school in Years 2 to 6, with many leaving before the end of Year 6.
- Since the previous inspection, there has been an increase in the numbers of pupils and staff and significant rebuilding of the school premises.
- Holywell has taken part in a national project on the use of the pupil premium, which researched its use and feedback between school and home on eligible pupils' achievement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards further, particularly in writing, by:
 - ensuring greater opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills purposefully in all subject areas
 - strengthening the school's current marking and feedback systems to provide more opportunities for pupils to reflect upon and improve their learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- From considerably lower starting points than those expected for their age on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage, all pupils are making good progress and reach standards that are very broadly average by the end of Year 6. Since the previous inspection, standards have risen and they continue to rise.
- Children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes because there is a good mix of adult-led activities and those chosen by children. Adults extend children's knowledge and thinking, rightly putting a strong emphasis on developing language. However, by the time they enter Year 1, children's skills are still below those that are expected for their age.
- The school promotes equality of opportunity well. It ensures that all pupils who join the school part way through the school year, disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs or those who are learning English as an additional language are very well cared for and supported.
- Regardless of their ethnic heritage, pupils in all year groups are making better than the progress expected nationally and are on track to get improved test results in 2013. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are supported well in class or through small-group or one-to-one sessions, and as a result they achieve well in all subjects.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve well. They gain a good understanding of English and are able to follow the mainstream curriculum with confidence.
- The school's own data show there is no significant difference between the attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals and that of other pupils in English and mathematics. The funding is used effectively to provide additional staff, to pay for the wide range of school visits and visitors, including residential trips and other social learning initiatives including orienteering, sailing, climbing and other regular outdoor learning experiences. The school has taken part in a national project and evaluated the impact of initiatives to improve the attainment of pupils eligible to the pupils premium. Current data confirm these initiatives have helped these pupils to achieve well.
- Pupils' progress accelerates as they get older, particularly in Key Stage 2, and is tracked regularly and rigorously. In 2012, more pupils exceeded the progress expected in English and mathematics than in most schools nationally. This represents good achievement.
- The school's actions to raise standards and accelerate progress since the previous inspection have proved successful. However, pupils' progress in writing lags behind that in reading. Some pupils who are at a very early stage of learning English and some younger pupils who find pencil control difficult lack practice in writing.
- The limited opportunity that pupils have to practise using their writing skills in all subjects is slowing their progress. Even so, pupils' progress is improving securely because the school has done a great deal to raise the profile of writing across the school, including providing more time for pupils to write at length. In addition, the 'writing pathway' is used to stimulate pupils' ideas for writing effectively.

The quality of teaching is good

- Pupils make good progress because the quality of teaching is consistently good and, occasionally, outstanding. Teachers have good subject knowledge and there is evidence of consistent practice as a result of whole-staff training.
- Teachers form very strong relationships with their classes and pupils respond readily to high expectations of their behaviour and the expectation that they will work hard. They are given many opportunities to reflect, think hard and to work in cooperation with others. As a result, teaching plays a major part in pupils' good spiritual, social and moral development.
- Teachers plan a range of interesting activities and give pupils work that helps them to do their best. They ask probing questions that encourage pupils to give extended answers and justify their opinions. As a result, pupils' speaking and communication skills are developing well across the school.
- Where learning is most rapid and teaching is strongest, lessons move at a good pace and pupils are using their knowledge and skills to develop their understanding. In a Key Stage 2 mathematics lesson, for example, pupils were discussing obstacles and errors in their learning following a problem-solving activity they had carried out the previous day. They made confident and articulate contributions in response to the teacher's careful and sensitive questioning and probing. They worked very well in pairs and table groups, having informed discussions on their learning.
- Children are taught well in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Exciting and imaginative activities are planned with a clear focus on improving children's language skills and developing independence and concentration.
- The school's tracking of pupils' individual progress is rigorous and effective. Teachers are making increasingly effective use of the resulting information to match tasks to the needs of different groups of learners. This means that the level of challenge is usually appropriate to pupils' learning needs and abilities.
- Teaching assistants play an important and effective role in supporting pupils, especially those who are find learning difficult or who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, so that these pupils make good progress and achieve well. Opportunities to work in different groups support pupils in developing their use of language, particularly for pupils for whom English is an additional language or those who join the school part way through the year.
- Marking is regular and includes detailed comments to show pupils how to improve. However, follow-up to the guidance given varies too much in quality across classes. Consequently, some pupils do not have enough opportunities to respond to teachers' comments and think through what they should have done better so they can take their learning further forward.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Behaviour is exemplary and relationships with staff are highly positive. Pupils are exceptionally polite, well mannered and motivated. They work well together to discuss ideas and support one another, particularly when pupils are newly arrived from other countries.
- Pupils' excellent behaviour and positive attitudes to school make an outstanding contribution to their good learning and progress. Pupils are exceptionally keen to learn. They strive to give of

their best and work hard. They say that they enjoy reading and the majority read widely.

- Pupils enjoy learning about each other's cultures and backgrounds and say they are very proud to learn in such a welcoming happy atmosphere. One of the many strengths of this highly inclusive school is the way in which pupils from many different backgrounds work and play happily together. The 'Holywell Explorers' sessions where pupils engage in high quality, practical-learning activities in the school grounds support their collaborative learning experiences and encourage curiosity.
- Almost all parents have no concerns about behaviour and feel the school keeps their children safe. Pupils have a very good awareness of how to keep safe. Pupils can explain the dangers of inappropriate use of social-networking sites on the internet. They understand the forms that bullying can take and are completely confident that staff would sort out any problems that any pupil might have.
- The school's records and incident logs relating to behaviour over time show very few incidents of poor behaviour and that, when there have been isolated cases, they are dealt with swiftly and appropriately.
- The school places a high priority on good attendance. As a result of rigorous and robust school action, attendance and punctuality have improved significantly over the last year – excellent improvement since the previous inspection. The family-support worker is working closely with families to strengthen the good links the school has developed with the community, but family mobility is unhelpful to some pupils' regular attendance. Staff at the school provide very effective support for pupils and families who are experiencing difficulties – including the provision of family-learning projects.

The leadership and management are good

- The leadership and management of the headteacher are significant strengths. He is very committed to the school and community, highly ambitious in improving the prospects for pupils and parents and held in high regard in the local community. Strong teamwork and enthusiastic and determined staff do the very best for the pupils. The school is managing the expanding number of classes due to the rise in pupil numbers very well.
- Leaders and managers including the governing body, evaluate the school's effectiveness accurately. They use their self-evaluation findings to identify what could be done better and incorporate this into the well-directed school development plan. Leaders rigorously check the quality of teaching and provide effective opportunities for the professional development of staff. The action taken improves both the quality and impact of teaching on learning.
- The funding for pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is used astutely to provide extra, targeted support. The progress of these pupils is closely monitored and evaluated and their progress is good, matching that of other pupils.
- The curriculum is very helpful to pupils' learning. It not only supports their good learning and progress but also strongly promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. A wide range of rich and memorable visits, visitors and experiences extends pupils' learning beyond the classroom. These activities make a major contribution to pupils' excellent personal development and behaviour, their confidence in dealing with others, their willingness to reflect and think deeply, and their awareness of the world around them, both locally and abroad.

- The local authority has supported the school effectively over the years. It now provides 'light touch' support for this good school, being confident in the strong leadership.
- Relationships with parents are very strong. Parents appreciate the warm family atmosphere of the school and feel that their children are very well supported, particularly the many who are learning English as an additional language. Parents are actively encouraged to be part of the school community. Opportunities to join in activities alongside their children, such as the 'stay and play' session observed in Reception and family-learning courses, are particularly effective.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a wide range of skills and experience and are knowledgeable and supportive. They are fully committed to the school and local area. They keep checks on how well teaching is improving and how this is related to salary increases, making sure the systems are robust. Governors visit the school frequently and receive informative reports and information from the headteacher, including their own more detailed version of Ofsted's Data Dashboard. They use this information to determine how well pupils are achieving. Consequently, they know which areas need to be improved and are able to check whether these are being addressed. They manage finances efficiently and evaluate whether the pupil premium is being used well and making a difference to the eligible pupils. Governors undertake training to ensure that they keep their knowledge and skills up to date. They fulfil their statutory duties effectively, ensuring that safeguarding procedures meet requirements.

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	117290
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	401661

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	468
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Irvin Needle
Headteacher	John Fowler
Date of previous school inspection	08 July 2010
Telephone number	01923 225188
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