

Sheerhatch Primary School

Willington Road, Cople, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK44 3TH

Inspection dates

17–18 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	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- School leaders have not ensured that the achievement of all pupils has improved sufficiently or rapidly enough.
- Leaders regularly monitor pupils' progress but the actions taken to improve this are not routinely evaluated for effectiveness.
- Teaching is not consistently good and learning activities are not always planned at the appropriate level for pupils. This is because teachers do not always use assessment information in their planning.
- Appropriate training has been provided for all staff but this has not significantly improved the quality of teaching, for example, in phonics.
- Teachers' expectations are not high enough. The most able pupils are not always set tasks that stretch them sufficiently so they do not always make as much progress as they should.
- The achievement of more vulnerable groups of pupils is very variable.
- Teaching assistants are not always guided and supported sufficiently to ensure that the pupils they are working with make good progress.
- Governors have not challenged the school to improve achievement with sufficient rigour.

The school has the following strengths

- The successful merger of Cople and Willington Lower Schools has resulted in strong and supportive staff networks and teamwork.
- The ethos and values of the school are constantly reinforced and these are reflected in pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviours.
- The school provides a caring and nurturing environment where pupils feel safe. Safeguarding is effective.
- Provision in the early years has improved and children develop a wide range of skills. They are well cared for and safe.
- Pupils achieve well in science.
- The school provides a good range of opportunities for pupils to develop leadership skills and a range of interests during extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils' behaviour and attendance are good.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good by:
 - raising teachers' expectations to ensure that all pupils are provided with suitable and challenging learning activities
 - monitoring the impact of training to ensure that this has raised the effectiveness of teachers' performance
 - ensuring that all teaching assistants have the training and guidance necessary to support the learning of all pupils.
- Raise achievement in key stages 1 and 2 by:
 - using assessment information to plan learning activities that challenge all pupils to reach higher standards
 - evaluating the quality and impact of the extra support provided for more vulnerable groups of pupils and adjusting this when necessary
 - planning learning activities that stretch and challenge the most able pupils
 - using a wider range of learning activities and strategies to improve the progress of all pupils in phonics.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - securing improvements in pupils' overall achievement with a greater sense of urgency
 - ensuring that the governing body focuses on the importance of raising achievement and the rigorous monitoring of pupils' progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because achievement is not improving rapidly enough.
- The actions of the headteacher and her senior leaders have not secured sufficient improvements in pupils' achievement. Leaders have not ensured that teaching is consistently good enough to raise pupils' overall achievement, and particularly that of the most able pupils.
- The school's self-evaluation does not focus sharply enough on the achievement of pupils. The priorities in the school development plan are appropriate. However, not all targets in this plan are clear enough for senior leaders to judge how well they have been met or for governors to check the rate of improvements and to hold leaders to account.
- Improved systems to track pupils' progress provide useful information but are not used effectively to identify where teaching is less effective. Resulting plans are insufficiently focused on improving the consistency of teaching and learning.
- The headteacher monitors teacher's performance and their targets are generally matched to the needs of the school. Leaders and teachers receive regular training opportunities. Pockets of weak practice remain, however, and are not effectively challenged.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities has been reorganised by a new leader. Pupils' needs are identified early. However, case studies demonstrate that these pupils make variable progress from their starting points.
- The pupil premium funding does not make a sufficient impact on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Plans do not convey the expected impact of the spending or how this will be evaluated.
- Leaders make effective use of the physical education and sport premium. All pupils are able to participate in competitive sports events and they are positive about the range of sporting activities available at the school.
- The school has developed a broad curriculum and this is shared in weekly curriculum plans for staff. However, leaders do not check how effectively and consistently these plans are delivered. The science curriculum is well led. The school was recently awarded the Gold Primary Science Quality Mark.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development are good. The values and ethos of the school underpin assembly themes, personal and social education and day-to-day school life. For example, pupils have the opportunity to join 'RotaKids'. This group has links with the local Rotary Club. Pupils collect for a number of charitable organisations and support a school in Kenya.
- Links between the school and parents and carers are well established. The majority of parents who responded to Parent View were very positive about the school and the care and attention that their children receive. One parent summarised the strength of

the school: 'Sheerhatch is a wonderfully friendly village school with approachable teachers.'

- The school recently purchased a multi-media pod to inform and engage parents and pupils in the life of the school. For example, it has been pre-loaded with information and video clips on healthy lifestyles and key information about the school and the curriculum.
- The school shows the capacity to improve. The leadership team has expanded this year so that it is able to manage both sites and the increased number of pupils. It has accomplished the school merger effectively and there is evidence of strong teamwork across both sites.

Governance of the school

- Governors are very committed and supportive of the school. The governing body formed fairly recently when the Cople and Willington Lower Schools federated prior to the merger. The chair of governors is very experienced but there are currently two vacancies on the governing body and there is no vice chair.
- Governors know and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school. There is little evidence, however, that they routinely monitor the achievement of pupils or the quality of teaching. Governing body minutes do not indicate that senior leaders have been rigorously challenged about these issues. Governors are not fully aware of the need for urgent improvements to enable all pupils, particularly the most able, to make strong progress.
- Governors have a wide range of relevant skills and experience such as in human resources and finance. These have been particularly useful during the merger process. Governors have high aspirations for the new school and are excited by the new opportunities the merger presents.
- The governors hold the school to account for safeguarding very effectively.
- Governors have attended a variety of training events and are invited to attend those organised by the school.
- Governors understand the requirements of performance management and are actively involved in the appraisal of the headteacher.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and staff ensure that all pupils, particularly the most vulnerable, are well cared for and protected. Parents who completed the Parent View survey confirmed this. Pupils said that they feel safe at school and they know who to approach if they have a concern or are upset. Care is especially strong for those pupils who have social and emotional difficulties.
- Pupils are kept safe on each school site. Site perimeters are secure. Entrances to each school are locked.
- The designated leaders for safeguarding keep precise records of any concerns and how

they have been followed up. Referrals are made to external agencies when necessary.

- The safeguarding leads are well trained. Staff and governors also receive regular training.
- The single central record meets all statutory requirements. There are rigorous processes for staff recruitment and safeguarding checks.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe from 'stranger danger', on the internet and when accessing other social media.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is not consistently good enough to ensure that all pupils make good progress. Expectations of what pupils can do are sometimes too low and work is not always matched to pupils' abilities. Too many pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Teachers do not consistently use assessment information in their lesson planning. Tasks set for the most able pupils do not always challenge or inspire them. Pupils told inspectors that when they completed their work quickly they were sometimes provided with extra work or told to read a book.
- Pupils' reading records indicate that they are encouraged to read widely and often in school and at home. However, inspection evidence indicates that teachers do not always make the most of the wide range of learning activities and resources available for the teaching of phonics. Consequently, pupils do not always concentrate as well as they could.
- Work in books demonstrates that by the end of Year 2, most pupils use basic punctuation appropriately. Spelling is not as strong. In key stage 2, even the most able pupils make basic spelling mistakes.
- In key stage 2, teachers sometimes do not explain mathematical concepts well enough and this hinders progress.
- The relationships between teachers and pupils are usually very warm and supportive. Most pupils have positive attitudes towards learning and want to do well. Teachers generally manage pupils' behaviour well.
- Inspection evidence shows that the impact of teaching assistants varies. In some lessons, they work well with large groups of pupils. This is effective when the work is challenging, well planned and pupils' behaviour is well managed. However, this is not consistent in all classes.
- Teachers consistently share the purpose of each lesson with pupils. Most teachers use effective questioning to reinforce pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- In accordance with the school's assessment policy, teachers mark pupils' work regularly and provide encouraging feedback. Classroom displays provide advice and support for pupils' learning.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school actively promotes the Sheerhatch values. Pupils are encouraged to be: safe, honest, enthusiastic, encouraging, respectful, hard-working, ambitious, tolerant, caring and happy. These values are reinforced during assemblies and lessons which specifically develop pupils' personal and social skills. Assemblies, in particular, focus on moral development.
- Pupils are taught about Islam, Judaism, Christianity and Hinduism in religious education lessons and they also learn about the importance of religious tolerance. Racist incidents are rare and the school is a calm and harmonious environment.
- Pupils have a good understanding of all forms of bullying. They say that it is rare at the school. Pupils know who to approach if they need help or have a problem.
- Pupils are confident and articulate because teachers ensure that they provide plentiful opportunities for pupils to discuss their work with each other and adults in the classroom.
- The school provides a range of opportunities for pupils to take responsibility. Representatives from each class are on the School Council. Pupils are also responsible for the music during assemblies.
- Pupils have the opportunity to participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities. These include a number of sporting activities such as tag rugby, football, golf and table tennis. Science and cookery clubs are also offered and pupils can join a school choir. Pupils are generally enthusiastic about these clubs.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils take a pride in their school. Most are keen and enthusiastic learners and try hard to succeed. They work well together, are courteous, friendly and helpful to others.
- The new behaviour policy has had a positive impact. The clear systems for managing behaviour are implemented well by staff and understood by pupils.
- Pupils' conduct during break and lunchtimes is good. Playground space on both sites is limited but pupils share the space sensibly and enjoy playing together
- Pupils with specific behavioural needs are supported effectively. The school actively promotes the importance of mental and emotional health.
- The headteacher monitors attendance rigorously and absences are followed up promptly. As a result, attendance is currently well above the national average and punctuality is also good.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- In 2017, the number of pupils in Year 1, at both sites, who achieved the expected standard in the phonics check was below the national average. Recent school performance information indicates that a significant number of current Year 1 pupils are not making enough progress to secure consistently good outcomes. Pupils in this group have been given extra support but the impact of this support has not been evaluated.
- The proportion of pupils in 2017 at the Cople site who achieved the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1 was slightly higher than the national average. Pupils at the Willington site performed less well and did not achieve the expected standards. Inspection evidence, and school performance information, indicate that current pupils appear to be making expected progress in all three areas.
- The number of pupils who achieved greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics was well below the national average in key stage 1 at both sites in 2017. Inspection evidence, and school performance information, indicate that a similar trend continues in the present Years 1 and 2. The school has identified this as an area for improvement but inspection evidence indicates that there are few strategies in place that are having a positive impact on improving pupils' progress.
- The number of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is small but too many are not making expected progress from their starting points because the support provided for some pupils does not match their needs closely enough. This is being addressed by the new leader for SEN.
- The number of disadvantaged pupils is also small. A significant number of these pupils require further support in order to make expected progress from their starting points. The school has also identified this as an area for further development and improvement.
- School performance information suggests that most pupils in Years 3 and 4 are making good progress in reading and writing. However, the quality of the writing of the most able pupils in these two year groups is often similar. A significant number of the most able pupils in Year 4 are not writing as extensively as they should. Pupils' progress in mathematics is variable in Years 3 and 4. This is because the quality of teaching is not consistently good.
- School performance information indicates that pupils in Year 5 are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Inspection evidence indicates that progress in Year 5 is strongest in reading and writing.
- Pupils in all years are making good progress in science. They are developing good social skills and spiritual and emotional understanding, and demonstrate an appreciation of music. Most pupils are also acquiring physical skills appropriate to their age.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years provision is well led. The early years lead has improved the resources and the outdoor environment since she has been in post. She has an informed understanding of the strengths and areas for development within the Reception class.
- The quality of teaching and learning is usually good. The curriculum offers a wide range of learning activities. These are well organised and designed so that children are able to develop independence, cooperative skills, and self-direction.
- The early years lead knows the children well. She monitors children's achievements rigorously. Their progress is tracked and their learning needs identified so that appropriate support can be provided when necessary. Individual folders of work are used effectively to provide evidence of progress and the development of new skills.
- Children are well behaved and show an obvious enjoyment in their learning. For example, a group of children were totally absorbed when they mixed a variety of 'potions' in beakers using different liquids and powders.
- Children join the Reception class with knowledge, understanding and skills that are broadly average. The number of children who reach a good level of development improved in 2017 and is at the national average. The early years lead has been challenged to raise her expectations this year. Consequently, children are developing good communication, phonics, numeracy and writing skills.
- Engagement with parents is strong. There are two class newsletters produced each term. Parents are encouraged to communicate with the teacher on a regular basis and are invited to visit the school. Children cook for their parents during this event and it is always well attended.
- Transition arrangements are well organised. The early years lead visits local pre-school settings to collect information about children entering the school. Children in the early years go on a school trip and have regular reading sessions with their future Year 1 teacher. As a result, children settle well.
- The provision is very safe. Gates are locked and supervising adults are well trained. Children are cared for and nurtured.

School details

Unique reference number	109442
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10041776

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 to 10
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	141
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	R. Baxter
Headteacher	Helen Johnson
Telephone number	01234 838 827
Website	www.sheerhatchprimary.org.uk
Email address	head@sheerhatchprimary.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is based on two sites in adjoining villages. This resulted from the merger of two lower schools (Cople and Willington) in September 2017. Early years provision is based at the Willington site. Year 5 is based at the Cople site. Years 1 and 2 are combined and there is one class on each site. Years 3 and 4 are organised in a similar way. There is no Year 6 at present.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium funding is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is below the national average. The proportion of pupils with education, health and care plans is below average.
- The headteacher, previously at the Cople site, now leads Sheerhatch Primary School.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons and visited every class in the school at least once. The majority of lesson observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher and assistant headteacher. Inspectors also carried out learning walks to observe the quality of the wider curriculum and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
- Inspectors assessed the quality of pupils' work by scrutinising a range of written work. Examples were selected from the present academic year and across a range of subjects and year groups.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, staff, pupils and governors. The lead inspector also met with the school improvement partner from Bedford Borough Council.
- Inspectors looked at documentation, including the school's analysis of its strengths and weaknesses, information on pupils' achievement, records of behaviour and safety and monitoring of the records of the governing body.
- Inspectors spoke with parents in the playground. Account was also taken of the 30 parent, 27 pupil and 12 staff responses on the online questionnaires.

Inspection team

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