

Palace Fields Primary Academy

Badger Close, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 2QW

Inspection dates

16–17 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	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.

- All pupils, especially those who join the school during the school year, achieve well.
- From well below expected individual starting points, they make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Children make outstanding progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Those pupils in the specially resourced provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make outstanding progress from their individual starting points.
- Teaching is good and outstanding practice is evident in some classes.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are good. They enjoy school and say, and their parents fully agree, that they feel completely safe.
- The extensive range of creative and physical activities offered by the school makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Senior leaders and the governors have improved the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement considerably since the last inspection.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not consistently use information about how well pupils, and particularly the most able, have learned, to sufficiently challenge them to achieve the best they possibly can.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' workbooks does not always identify the next steps for pupils to take to improve their work.
- Leaders and governors do not precisely check that all pupils and, particularly the most able, achieve their best.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 14 lessons.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, staff, members of the governing body, the school improvement partner and groups of pupils.
- The inspectors examined the school's own documentation relating to pupils' progress, school self-evaluation and policies relating to safeguarding.
- The inspectors listened to pupils read and spoke informally to pupils during playtimes and lunchtimes.
- Responses from 22 parents and carers to the online questionnaire Parent View were considered. The inspectors took account of the views of a group of parents who spoke to an inspector in a meeting.
- The inspector scrutinised the 24 responses to the staff questionnaire provided by Ofsted.

Inspection team

Clare Henderson, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Douglas Scholes

Additional Inspector

Terry Bond

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well-above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus is above average.
- The school offers specially resourced provision for up to 10 disabled pupils and those with special educational needs with cognitive delay.
- The proportion of pupils who join or leave the school during the school year is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Palace Fields Primary Academy converted to become an academy on 14 February 2012. When its predecessor school, Palace Fields Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that its impact on pupils' achievement in Years 1 to 6 is outstanding by ensuring:
 - teachers use the information about how well pupils and, particularly the most-able, have learned to sufficiently challenge them to achieve the best they possibly can
 - teachers' marking of pupils' workbooks consistently identifies the next steps for pupils to take to improve their work.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management to outstanding by ensuring leaders and governors precisely check that all pupils, and particularly of the most able, achieve their best.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Most children start school with skills which are well below those typical for their age, and particularly low in their language and social development. The outstanding range of stimulating activities foster children's enthusiasm for learning means that children make rapid progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are very well prepared for their work in Year 1.
- Although pupils' attainment was below average in 2012 in Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics, these pupils made good progress from their individual starting points.
- In Year 2 in 2013 and in the current Years 1 and 2 classes, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is broadly average for most groups of pupils and represents good progress from their individual starting points.
- Test results at the end of Year 6 in 2012 were below average. However, these pupils made good progress from their individual starting points. Their attainment in 2013 rose to broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics and the progress pupils made was good.
- Pupils' achievement is good but not outstanding in Years 1 to 6 overall, because the most able pupils do not achieve as well as they could.
- Reading is taught well and achievement is good in all year groups. Through improvements in the teaching of the way letters link to sounds, by pitching the learning activities to match the abilities of pupils, they begin to read confidently and develop an enthusiasm for reading.
- A strong focus on extending pupils' mathematical skills through problem solving activities which demand pupils use thinking and reasoning skills is seen in all classes.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs in the specialist resourced provision make outstanding progress from their individual starting points because specialist medical intervention and guidance for learning is provided by well qualified and effective support and teaching staff. This is very carefully and sensitively tailored to meet their individual needs.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs in Years 1 to 6 make good progress from their individual starting points. This is because they receive specific additional support from skilled teaching assistants.
- Pupils supported through the pupil premium funding made better progress to pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics in 2012. This includes those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals whose attainment in reading was similar to other pupils in the school, but was generally one to two terms behind in writing and mathematics. The school quickly addressed these differences by pinpointing the needs of these pupils and provided additional writing and mathematics individual and small group support and, as a result, the gap closed rapidly in 2013.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching observed by the inspectors in lessons and in individual and group support for pupils, especially including those who join the school during the school year, ensures that they make good progress from their individual starting points and during their time in the school.
- Pupils make good progress in all year groups and outstanding progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage because of the good and at times outstanding teaching they receive.
- This view is supported unanimously by the parents the inspectors spoke to and by pupils who say 'teachers are nice and help you if you find your work hard'.
- The teaching of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs in the resourced provision is outstanding because lessons are exciting and challenging and pupils are fully engaged in learning. As a result, these pupils make outstanding progress and equality of opportunity and potential discrimination is tackled very well.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are friendly, and pupils are encouraged to enjoy learning, which they clearly do. In those lessons which are outstanding, progress is rapid

because pupils, as for instance observed in a literacy lesson in the Reception class, are completely enthralled and eager to answer the challenging questions which make them think hard when choosing the right words to include in their stories about the Giant's kitchen.

- In those lessons observed which were less than outstanding, work was not fully matched to pupils learning needs and particular for the most-able and so they did not make the best possible progress. Furthermore, teachers' marking of workbooks does not consistently explain to pupils what they need to do to improve their work.
- The teaching of the pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is managed well, with good use of specialist support staff. This ensures these pupils achieve well.
- Teaching makes a strong contribution to pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Numerous sports, music and artistic opportunities enable pupils to develop music and performance based skills which boost their confidence, self-esteem and opportunities to succeed extremely effectively. This prepares them well for their future lives.
- Teaching is not outstanding as achievement for some pupils and, particularly the most-able, is inconsistent over their time in the school and teaching has not led to rapid progress for all pupils.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour observed in lessons was good and sometimes outstanding. This has a positive effect on pupils' good achievement. School records show that behaviour is typically good in classes, around the school and over time.
- Pupils behave well around the school, in the playground and dining hall showing good manners and courtesy towards each other and adults. They are especially welcoming to those pupils who join the school during the school year.
- Pupils are proud of the school and say they particularly enjoy the wide range of exciting physical, sporting and creative opportunities which are provided, such as visiting Wales for a camping trip.
- They enjoy a good range of responsibilities in their classrooms and around the school, such as being members of the school council or playground leaders.
- Members of the school council, for instance, are highly committed to listening to and responding where they can, to the views of their classmates. They speak enthusiastically about being able to provide more equipment for pupils to play with at lunchtime. Such roles enable them to learn to act responsibly and to support each other well.
- Behaviour is judged as good rather than outstanding. Occasionally, when the pupils are expected to work independently, they chatter to friends rather than concentrate fully on their learning.
- The behaviour of pupils is checked regularly and records show that any misbehaviour is dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils know what is meant by bullying and the different forms it can take and say the anti-bullying week really helps them with their understanding. They say that, even though bullying does happen, it is rare and is quickly sorted out by staff.
- Pupils say, and their parents agree, that they feel safe and understand how to keep safe. Pupils say teachers and support staff have helped them to understand how to take care on the roads or when using the internet.
- Systems for recording and for following up any incidents of misbehaviour are consistent and secure. Strong links with social services and other educational partners ensure all pupils and their families are given appropriate support and guidance.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to each other and enjoy school. This is reflected in their rapidly improving and now average attendance.

The leadership and management are good

- The school is well led by the headteacher and senior leaders. Leadership of the specialist resourced provision and the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. As a result, pupils in these departments make outstanding progress in their learning.
- Senior leaders regularly check the quality of teaching which has improved significantly since the last inspection. Targets set for teachers concentrate on raising pupils' achievement, and are well linked to training and to their salary progression.
- The school's plans for improvement concentrate on the right areas. The rise in standards in 2013 and as observed in lessons and in pupils' current work in all the classes is testament to this.
- Despite these improvements, leadership is not outstanding because leaders and governors do not precisely check how well pupils are learning, particularly the most-able, to ensure they are learning as well as they are capable.
- Pupils' learning in their subjects is planned well. Pupils enjoy interesting lessons and experiences in which to develop their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills well. Parents and pupils are eager to say how much their learning is extended through accessing the 'I am' computer-led homework activities.
- Arrangements for safeguarding pupils and child protection procedures fully meet statutory requirements.
- School leaders work in close partnership with the school improvement partner. High quality specialist teaching of music, sports, dance, drama and Spanish, using external specialist staff, successfully enriches pupils' creativity and well-being.
- The new primary school sport funding has increased pupils' participation in physical education and sport and is contributing well to developing better physical well-being for pupils.
- School leaders have built a strong relationship with parents. Regular coffee mornings and the highly informative website help extend communications between home and school effectively. As a result, parents are firmly supportive of the school and its leaders.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body actively seeks to support the senior leadership team in its efforts to improve the school further. It uses the information it receives from leaders to review the quality of teaching and learning and have a clear understanding of the link between teachers' performance and their salary progression and promotion.
 - The governing body is aware of the additional support provided to pupils from the pupil premium and has been provided with sufficient information to fully analyse the impact of the funding and to review the progress these pupils make. However, this same measure of analysis of how well the most able pupils are learning in their time in the school is not as strong. The governing body monitors the financial position of the school carefully and measures the effect the new primary school sports funding is having on pupils' achievement and physical well-being.

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	137301
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	426266

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	235
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joanne Tringham
Headteacher	Dianne Moran
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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