

Spellbrook Primary School

London Road, Spellbrook, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 4BA

Inspection dates

24–25 April 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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leadership is underdeveloped and is not fully effective. Leaders do not have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Leaders have not focused well enough on developing and improving the quality of teaching to achieve consistently good outcomes for pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. As a result, these areas are less effective than they were at the time of the previous inspection, when they were judged to be good.
- Leaders' and teachers' expectations are not high enough. As a result, too few pupils make rapid progress or attain as highly as they should.
- Attendance is lower than it should be and shows little sign of improvement.
- The pupil premium grant is not used well enough. As a result, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are mixed, with some pupils not making the progress they should.

The school has the following strengths

- Governance is becoming a strength of the school. Governors are increasingly aware of what needs to change and improve. They are now better able to hold leaders to account.
- Spellbrook is a lovely, welcoming school with a strong 'family' feel. Pupils enjoy coming to school, and relationships between adults and pupils are very strong.
- Pupils feel safe at school. They feel safe from bullying and have faith that staff will help them if it should occur.
- Pupils behave very well, and lessons are rarely disturbed by inappropriate behaviour.
- Children get off to a good start in the early years. Provision is well led and managed and there is clear evidence of ongoing improvement.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - self-evaluation is analytical and appropriately self-critical, so that leaders have an accurate view of the school’s strengths and weaknesses
 - improvement plans are based on accurate self-evaluation and focus firmly on the most important priorities
 - monitoring activities have a demonstrable effect on improving the quality of teaching and learning
 - methods and approaches put in place to support pupils are monitored closely and changed if they are not having the desired impact on progress
 - the pupil premium grant is spent effectively so that it has a demonstrable impact on improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that more pupils make rapid progress by ensuring that:
 - staff throughout the school have high expectations of what pupils are able to achieve
 - pupils’ progress is tracked carefully, and prompt action is taken when pupils are not doing as well as they should
 - pupils are provided with the advice and guidance they need to learn more and remember more.
- Improve attendance so that it is at least in line with the national average.

An external review of the school’s use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders do not have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Their view is overly generous and they think that the school is better than it is. The school's self-evaluation documentation lacks analysis and does not identify the most important priorities for school improvement.
- The school's improvement plan is unlikely to help leaders to improve the school. It does not link to leaders' self-evaluation and does not focus on the most important priorities for school improvement. The plan lacks the features of well-written plans, such as deadlines, milestones and measurable success criteria.
- Leaders have not focused their efforts on checking and improving the quality of teaching in the school. As a result, the quality of teaching has slipped. There is little evidence that leaders monitor this crucial area effectively or that such monitoring has any impact on improving the quality of teaching throughout the school.
- The pupil premium funding is not spent effectively. Leaders have not ensured that spending has a clear impact on improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. When a specific measure is put in place to help an individual pupil, such as working with an adult in a small group, leaders do not check that it makes any difference to how well that pupil achieves. As a result, it is not clear that the pupil premium is having a positive effect on the outcomes of those it is intended for.
- Action has been taken to tackle the areas for improvement from the previous inspection, but this has not been fully effective. As a result, the previous areas for improvement have not been addressed fully. For example, leaders were previously tasked to 'increase the proportion of pupils who make rapid progress' and this is still something that leaders need to do.
- A small number of parents and carers expressed concerns about poor communication. Inspectors found that although leaders' intention is to issue a monthly newsletter to parents, this happens rarely. Leaders are aware that the intended regular communication is something that has 'slipped' and needs to improve.
- Leaders' tracking and monitoring of the progress pupils make do not have a notable impact on improving outcomes. Although leaders know how well, or otherwise, individual pupils are doing, they do not use this information well enough to make changes to teaching and learning and thus improve outcomes.
- Leaders have created a happy and welcoming school. Pupils enjoy coming to Spellbrook and are proud to be part of the school community. The vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View said that they would recommend the school to others. Many parents chose to leave positive comments about the school. For example, one parent summed up the views of many by saying, 'Spellbrook is a really nice little school that has the feel of a big family where everyone knows each other.'
- The sport premium is spent effectively. The funding has been used in a variety of suitable ways, including to introduce new sports to pupils, such as American football and ballroom dancing. Pupils benefit from involvement in a wide range of tournaments and competitions, as well as clubs and activities in physical education (PE) lessons.

- Pupils are taught well about fundamental British values such as democracy and the rule of law. They are taught to value all people equally and not to judge people on the basis of protected characteristics that they share.

Governance of the school

- Governance has improved and is becoming a strength of the school. Records of governing body meetings show that governors frequently ask leaders questions about a wide range of issues. These questions are becoming more challenging.
- Governors are increasingly aware of the weaker aspects of the school and what needs to be improved. They are now in a much better position to hold leaders to account. However, governors do not yet check well enough on issues such as whether the pupil premium is spent effectively.
- Governors take their responsibilities for ensuring that pupils are safe very seriously. The safeguarding governor comes into school regularly to check aspects of safeguarding practice, such as whether all adults are wearing lanyards, as the school's policy requires.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's single central record did not meet statutory requirements at the beginning of the inspection. The record did not show that all necessary checks had been carried out on members of staff prior to them being allowed to start work. However, the school was able to demonstrate that the required checks had been made and the single central record was updated to reflect this and to meet statutory requirements.
- Leaders recognised previous weaknesses in the way that records of child protection concerns were made and kept. These weaknesses were rectified prior to the start of the inspection. Leaders chose to move to an electronic recording system and they have found that this is working well.
- Staff know their pupils well. They are vigilant in noticing and reporting changes that could indicate abuse or neglect. Child protection records show that these concerns are taken seriously by the school's designated safeguarding leads and that appropriate action is taken when necessary.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Leaders have not focused well enough on maintaining and improving the quality of teaching since the previous inspection. There is no well-considered programme of monitoring or continuing professional development for staff. As a result, teaching is no longer consistently good, and pupils do not achieve as well as they should.
- Expectations at all levels are not high enough. Leaders do not expect enough from teachers, and teachers do not expect enough from pupils. This means that lower standards and less effort are accepted from pupils far too readily. Leaders and staff are not ambitious enough for pupils and this is reflected in the results of the Year 6 national tests.

- Expectations around the presentation of pupils' work are variable. Handwriting is sometimes poorly developed, and work does not show that great care has been taken. Pupils do not do their very best because it is not expected of them.
- Too often, pupils are not given the advice and guidance they need to improve their work and make rapid progress. For example, some pupils struggle with aspects of reading because they are not given the right help to develop effective strategies to read unfamiliar words or work out what they mean.
- Provision for the small number of disadvantaged pupils is underdeveloped. Although measures are in place to support this group of pupils, such as working in a small group, there is little evidence that they are having much impact on improving outcomes for this group. The measures taken are not matched well enough to the learning needs of individual pupils. Staff do not assess whether what has been put in place is making any difference to how well pupils are doing.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Pupils like their teachers and teaching assistants and they know that staff like them too. As a result, classrooms are happy and calm places. Pupils follow instructions and behave sensibly because classrooms are managed well.
- Mathematics is taught well. Measures put in place to improve teaching in this subject have been effective, and this is reflected in the better progress pupils make in mathematics.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are polite, friendly and well mannered. For example, they stand back to allow adults to pass through doorways and routinely say 'please' and 'thank you'. They are respectful to adults and to each other. Pupils were keen to speak with inspectors about their school and their work.
- Pupils feel safe at school. They say that there is very little bullying and any problems are sorted out quickly by staff. Pupils have been taught well about bullying and the forms that it can take. They have been taught to tell an adult if bullying occurs.
- The strong relationships between adults and pupils help to keep pupils safe. They know that they can talk to any adult if they are worried about something, whether it is something at school or at home. These very positive relationships extend to the midday supervisory assistants, who pupils love to chat to.
- Pupils show excellent attitudes to equality and diversity. They know that it is wrong to judge people on their physical or other characteristics, such as religious beliefs. During a meeting with the lead inspector, one pupil summed up the feeling of the group by saying, 'Everyone's beautiful in their own way.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.

- Pupils behave well in their classrooms and as they move around the building. They follow the school's rules and the instructions given to them by members of staff. Lessons are very rarely disrupted by poor behaviour.
- Pupils also behave well during less structured parts of the day. Pupils told inspectors that there is occasionally some 'silliness' but 'there's never anything serious.' This means that breaktimes are enjoyable and fun.
- Overall rates of attendance have been below average for the last three years. There is little evidence that this is improving and that the downward trend has been halted. However, there is little persistent absence and no groups of pupils are disadvantaged by low attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- There is variation from year to year in the outcomes of the Year 6 national tests as a result of the small cohorts involved. That is, there are approximately 15 pupils in each year group, so the outcome for each individual pupil has a far greater impact on the school's overall results than might otherwise be the case.
- Middle-attaining pupils' progress in reading was well below average, and some of the lowest in the country, in 2017. Pupils' attainment was also below the national average. Inspection evidence shows that these very weak results are not typical outcomes for current pupils.
- Overall, pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics was similar to the national average in 2017. Pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics was also broadly in line with the national average. The work in current pupils' exercise books reflects this. That is, most pupils are making progress and are attaining at a similar standard to others across the country, but no better than this.
- The school's assessment information shows that, in most year groups, current pupils are making the progress that leaders expect in reading, writing and mathematics. In one year group, pupils are making slower progress. This is reflective of the leaders' low expectations of what pupils are capable of.
- Outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are mixed. About a third of this group are making slow progress, while a similar proportion are making rapid progress. The impact of actions taken to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is not monitored closely enough to ensure that they are fully effective.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are similarly mixed. Most disadvantaged pupils are making similar progress to their classmates. However, about a third are making slow progress because they are not being given the right support to help them move forward more quickly.
- Results of the Year 1 phonics screening check show an improving trend. An above-average proportion of pupils reached the expected level in 2017. This improvement is not yet fully reflected in pupils' reading and writing.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years provision is led and managed well. Leaders have identified the right areas to focus on, and provision is improving as a result. The good quality of the early years has been maintained during the leader's period of planned absence. The provision has benefited from well-chosen support from the local authority.
- Increasingly, children make good progress during their time in early years. Most children join the Nursery or Reception class with skills and abilities that are typical of their age. By the time they leave early years, most pupils have reached a good level of development in readiness for the demands of Year 1.
- The early years staff work very well together. They know the children well and plan activities to meet their individual interests and abilities. Adults support children well in their learning by, for example, encouraging them to talk about what they are doing or providing them with the necessary resources to follow a particular interest.
- The children behave very well in the early years. They learn the rules quickly and follow them consistently. The children are encouraged to think about and manage their own safety, at a level appropriate to their age. Children persist with activities for extended periods of time, showing interest and concentration.
- The early years class benefits from a large, attractive outdoor area. This space is used well by staff to provide learning opportunities across a range of areas. For example, during the inspection, children used their mathematical and design skills to make full-size robot costumes out of large cardboard boxes. A member of staff encouraged children to measure and mark their boxes before cutting, enabling them to be successful in making their robots.

School details

Unique reference number	117405
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10041883

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	111
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jo Pierce
Headteacher	Gillian Vise
Telephone number	01279 723204
Website	www.spellbrook.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@spellbrook.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 April – 1 May 2014

Information about this school

- Spellbrook is a small Church of England primary school that is part of the Diocese of St Albans. It has four mixed-aged classes for pupils between Nursery and Year 6.
- Two members of the permanent teaching staff are currently absent from school on periods of planned leave.
- The school meets current floor standards. These are the minimum standards, set by the government, for pupils' progress and attainment.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching and learning over time. They observed parts of nine lessons.
- Inspectors looked closely at the work in pupils' exercise books. They listened to pupils read and talked to them about their work.
- Inspectors looked at a range of the school's documents, including assessment information. They checked the school's single central record of pre-employment checks and other documentation concerned with safeguarding.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and senior teacher, other leaders, governors, a representative of the local authority and a group of pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils throughout the inspection and with parents as they brought their children to school. They also considered 35 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and 33 additional free-text comments.
- Inspectors took the 15 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 18 responses to the pupil survey into account.

Inspection team

Wendy Varney, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Debbie Rogan

Ofsted Inspector

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