

Swallow Dell Primary School

Blackthorn Road, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 3JP

Inspection dates 13–14 February 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		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils reach levels in reading, writing and mathematics which are expected for their age. They develop good personal skills.
- Teaching is good. Staff make sure that work interests pupils and that they enjoy their learning.
- Pupils do best of all in reading. They like choosing from a wide range of books.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils feel safe and are keen to learn.
- There are very good systems for checking how well pupils do and plenty of extra help for those who need it.
- Leaders make sure that staff training matches the school's needs. As a result, pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching are improving.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils do not do as well in mathematics as they do in reading and writing.
- Pupils do not do enough problem-solving and practical work or use their mathematical skills enough in other subjects.
- Teachers do not always make sure that more-able pupils do their very best.
- Systems used by leaders to check the quality of teaching do not focus sharply enough on raising it to outstanding.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 23 lessons or parts of lessons, of which three were joint observations with senior leaders. Fourteen members of staff were seen teaching.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils, members of the governing body, school leaders and staff. Discussion was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils during lessons about their work, looked at their books and listened to them read.
- Inspectors took account of written responses from parents and carers and 26 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View). Inspectors spoke to parents and carers at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors analysed responses from 21 questionnaires completed by school staff.
- Inspectors observed the school's work, looked at progress and attendance information, improvement plans, systems to check the quality of teaching, and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Vivienne McTiffen, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Paul Burton

Additional Inspector

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Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. About a quarter are from an ethnic or mixed-ethnic background. A small number speak English as an additional language but nearly all are fluent in English.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and for whom the school receives additional income (the pupil premium) is well above average.
- The school meets the government floor standards which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.
- Pupils are educated on site. There is no regular alternative off-site provision.
- The school runs a breakfast club and an after-school club which are both managed by the governing body.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement in mathematics to match that in reading and writing by:
 - giving pupils more chance to solve problems and use their mathematical skills in other subjects
 - making the most of pupils' keenness to learn by making sure they do more practical and shared activities.
- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
 - sharing the best examples of marking so all pupils receive the same guidance on how to do better and know what they are working towards
 - making sure that teachers in all classes give more-able pupils work that is just right for them and helps them to do their very best
 - giving clearer guidance to teachers so they know exactly how to improve their teaching to be outstanding.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Many children start in the Reception classes with skills that are much lower than those expected for their age. They settle in well. As confidence grows, they independently choose their daily tasks. They develop skills in reading, writing and mathematics and are well prepared for their learning in Year 1.
- The good start children make in the Reception classes is built upon as they move through the school. At the end of Key stage 1 standards are still below average but, by the time they reach the end of Year 6, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are average.
- Pupils do best of all in reading. In the recent Year 1 national screening test of pupils' knowledge of the sounds that letters make (phonics), pupils performed broadly in line with national expectations. The school's recent spending on books and attractive reading areas is proving worthwhile. Pupils say they like reading and enjoy using the on-line Bug Club. Pupils of all ages choose books that interest them. They read widely for enjoyment and to find out information.
- Stories often inspire pupils to write. For example, during the inspection, pupils read from a novel to work out what the main character looked like and how the character felt. They say that good examples from their reading helps them with their own writing. Pupils write in lots of different ways and in a range of subjects.
- In mathematics, pupils add, subtract, multiply and divide but do not use their mathematical skills enough in topics and other subjects. There are some good examples of pupils having a go at solving problems but this is not yet well established in all classes.
- Pupils acquire well-rounded personal skills and individual talents flourish. They take part in performances and sports activities. Mini-enterprise and business projects are popular. Pupils think up their own schemes, often to raise money, developing team-building and group-working skills well.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs do well because they are helped to reach their full potential. Well-organised and regular extra help for groups or individuals means that pupils make small steps towards their personal learning goals.
- Pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and the few who are learning to speak English do as well as other pupils. Their progress is carefully checked and they receive extra help if it is needed. Newcomers are welcomed and settle quickly.
- Income the school receives to support those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is spent wisely to benefit individuals. Extra support is helping to close any gaps in performance. Information on how well these pupils do shows they achieve in line with their classmates to reach average standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers encourage pupils to try things out for themselves. They help pupils to develop confidence in their own abilities and raise their aspirations. They make learning fun and often start a topic with a trip or visitor to school to attract pupils' interest.

- Teachers expect pupils to set their own level of challenge and push themselves to try harder work. More-able pupils often do work that is just right for their ability but, in some classes, the work is too easy and the pace of working too slow for them so they do not do their very best.
- Relationships are good and pupils' efforts are valued. There is plenty of opportunity for them to voice their opinions in lessons and share ideas with others. Staff frequently use the term 'learning muscles' which is readily adopted by pupils and inspires them to reason and develop their thinking skills.
- Teachers give helpful tips on how to improve when they mark pupils' work. The very best teaching makes sure pupils think about how well they are doing for themselves and know what they are working towards and how to improve, but this approach varies between classes.
- In the Reception classes, there is a good mix of tasks children choose for themselves and those that are led by adults. Children are motivated to learn because topics are based on their interests. For example, during the inspection, the story of 'Elmer' led to children finding out more about elephants and where they live.
- The teaching of reading has a high profile. Books are well organised so staff are confident that pupils can select for themselves texts that suit their reading level. Care is taken to make sure that books for older pupils interest them and make them want to read. Pupils benefit from regular sessions to learn about letters and sounds and daily reading.
- Teaching and learning support assistants work skilfully with small groups or individuals. They play a major role in aiding reading and developing pupils' personal and social skills. They are fully involved in lessons and often work closely with less-able pupils and those who have special educational needs, helping them to understand their work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils are attentive in lessons and say they like school. They appreciate the interesting topics and visits. One pupil sums it up when talking about a topic on the Second World War by saying it was 'absolutely amazing.'
- Pupils' eagerness to learn was shown during the inspection when they worked with visitors on practical mathematical tasks. They behaved well and really enjoyed the 'hands-on' work, sharing apparatus and playing mathematical games together. The school recognises that not enough of this practical approach is used in mathematics lessons.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils know the difference between right and wrong. All understand the school's systems to maintain good behaviour because staff consistently use the same approach and promote moral development well.
- Pupils say they feel safe and that the school takes care of them. They talk sensibly about different types of bullying and say the school 'is very strict on it'. Any incidents that do occur are stringently dealt with and recorded. Pupils are helped to understand how to deal with issues through assemblies and anti-bullying events.
- Pupils take on responsibilities to help others and the school. Those on the school council improve facilities, whilst the eco-council offers advice on how to save energy. There is a strong sense of belonging and tolerance towards each other. Pupils take an interest in those from different

backgrounds and relish new experiences.

- The school's efforts to encourage parents and carers to make sure pupils come to school regularly are beginning to take effect. The number of pupils who stay away from school for long periods is reducing but attendance remains below average.

The leadership and management are good

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have determinedly raised achievement and improved the quality of teaching. The headteacher clearly knows what she wants to achieve and transmits her commitment and ambition to staff. She heads a strong leadership team which is dedicated to improvement.
- The school makes good use of staff expertise and shares it with other schools. Training and targets for staff to improve their work matches the needs of the school well. However, not enough guidance is given on how teachers can make their teaching outstanding.
- Local authority support is used well to aid improvement. As a result, the school is strengthening the quality of teaching further and children's progress in the Reception classes is rapidly improving. Systems to analyse information on how well pupils do are rigorous and thorough.
- Leaders make sure the school is a happy place where everyone has the same chance to succeed. Those not doing as well as they should are identified and given extra help so they can catch up. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
- The school offers a good range of subjects with learning enhanced through trips, clubs and visitors. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Year 2 talked excitedly about their trip to Windsor castle as part of their learning about castles. These experiences promote pupils' cultural awareness well as do links with pupils in schools abroad.
- There are good links with parents and carers and various ways for them to be involved in their children's learning. Arrangements for children starting school are good. The daily breakfast and after-school clubs provide valuable facilities and a range of sociable and well-chosen activities which pupils enjoy.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors know exactly how well the school is doing and are fully involved in moving it forward. They keep themselves well-informed about pupils' progress and raise questions if pupils are not doing well enough. They know what effect spending, including the pupil premium, has on achievement. Governors are highly supportive of staff and have a clear understanding of the link between good teaching and good achievement. They are involved in arrangements for managing teachers' performance and decisions about staff development. They know how good teachers are rewarded and how any underperformance is tackled. Governors make sure their training is up to date and use local authority support well to improve their skills. They make sure that the school's policies are reviewed regularly and that safeguarding arrangements 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	133488
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	406524

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	370
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jeff Hawes
Headteacher	Clare Hollingsworth
Date of previous school inspection	13 June 2011
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