

Homerswood Primary and Nursery School

Kirklands, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire AL8 7RF

Inspection dates

22–23 January 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school is well led and managed. Following a period of turbulence due to extended staff absence, leaders are ensuring that there have been rapid improvements in the current year in both teaching and outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders have revised the school's approaches to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics. These are proving effective in developing pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills systematically. Consequently, pupils' progress in English and mathematics is now good after a dip in attainment in 2018.
- Improvements in the curriculum are well considered and have been managed effectively by middle leaders. However, middle leaders play too small a role in sharing good practice across the school to maintain and build on recent improvements in provision.
- Teachers know their pupils well and make learning fun. They sometimes do not extend the learning of the most able more quickly when they have grasped a skill or concept.
- Children in the early years settle quickly into school life. They are taught well and most make good progress, especially in the Reception class where provision is particularly strong.
- Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school and its leadership.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive good support from teachers and teaching assistants. They learn well and make strong progress from their various starting points.
- Despite recent improvements that are well led by a new 'pupil premium champion', the progress of disadvantaged pupils is too uneven. Provision for these pupils is not strong enough to ensure that all fulfil their potential.
- The school has a wealth of information on pupils' progress. Leaders do not use it sharply enough to check that any additional support for disadvantaged pupils and others is suitably targeted and is having the desired effect.
- Governors challenge leaders effectively. They supported the school well during the headteacher's long-term absence. They know the strengths of the school and what still needs improving.
- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils are proud of their school. They are well behaved and they feel safe.
- There is a happy atmosphere in school. Relationships among pupils and between adults and pupils are open, kindly and respectful.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers more consistently pitch work at the right level for the most able in English and mathematics and across the curriculum.
- Improve leadership by:
 - strengthening the way leaders use assessment information to target any additional support for pupils and ensure that it is having the desired effect
 - making better use of the pupil premium to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils, including reviewing the impact of spending more rigorously
 - giving middle leaders greater opportunity to share their good practice across the school.

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

Good

- The school is emerging from a year of turbulence due to staff absence with renewed energy. Leaders are ensuring that there is a clear understanding of what still needs improving.
- Since returning full time at the start of the academic year, the headteacher has taken swift and effective action to deal with the inconsistencies in provision that resulted in a dip in pupils' attainment in 2018. She is being supported well by the rest of the senior leadership team, most of whom are new to post this year.
- Staff feel well supported and challenged, and morale is high. Senior leaders are making sharp use of performance management procedures and access to training courses to strengthen teachers' practice further. This has improved teaching so that pupils' progress across the school is now mainly good. Gaps in their learning that emerged last year are being remedied.
- In the past academic year, in the absence of the headteacher, middle leaders, such as those in charge of English and mathematics, made helpful changes to the curriculum. These changes ensure that teachers are clearer about what they should be teaching and when. However, middle leaders have played a more limited part in improving teaching through sharing their good practice more widely.
- Leaders know that the pupil premium has not always had the desired impact on learning in the past. A newly appointed 'pupil premium champion' has made a good start to improving provision for these pupils. He is monitoring their learning much more closely than in the past and is setting disadvantaged pupils individual targets. These, along with improved teaching, are beginning to have a positive effect. Nonetheless, although the progress of disadvantaged pupils has improved in the current year, it continues to be too uneven. Consequently, it is recommended that a review of the pupil premium be carried out.
- Leaders have a detailed knowledge of each pupil as an individual. They supplement this with a wealth of data on pupils' attainment and progress. However, leaders do not use the data well enough to check that any additional support given to pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, is targeted well enough and is having the desired effect on their outcomes.
- The curriculum is interesting and varied and motivates pupils to succeed. Visits, visitors and clubs have a positive impact on raising pupils' aspirations and broadening their horizons. For example, older pupils talk very positively about their residential trip to the Isle of Wight, where they studied a different geographical location and developed skills such as teamwork and resilience.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils' understanding of British values is developed through events such as 'One World Week', where they learn about cultural diversity. This ensures that they are suitably prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders use the sport premium wisely to increase levels of pupils' participation in a range of sporting activities and competitions. Pupils raise their fitness levels through

regular activities, such as running or walking a daily mile, well-planned lessons and a wide range of clubs. Staff improve their skills in teaching physical education by working alongside expert coaches.

- Parents are very positive about the school. They appreciate the availability of staff and the quick response from leaders if they have any concerns. Parents value the extra support that children receive if they need it. Several parents said that they 'feel lucky' to drop their children off at the school each morning.

Governance of the school

- Governors have worked closely with the other school leaders and the local authority to successfully guide the school through a period of turbulence in the past academic year.
- Through its own rigorous monitoring systems, the governing body has a detailed knowledge of the school and is successful in holding school leaders to account for the school's performance. They continue to challenge other leaders to ensure that the recent good pace of improvement is maintained and built on.
- Governors bring a broad range of experience and expertise to their roles and have an accurate and realistic view of the school's effectiveness. They know what the school does well and are aware of the priorities for future developments. This includes their own responsibility for checking more closely that the pupil premium is being used to good effect.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All staff have had up-to-date training and are aware of the latest changes in legislation. They are aware of their responsibilities, including the need to look out for the potential radicalisation of pupils.
- Leaders understand well the community and families that the school serves. They work closely with parents and external agencies to ensure that pupils are safe in school and at home. There is detailed online record-keeping about any low-level concerns and a clear understanding of when concerns meet the threshold for referring them to other professionals.
- Governors understand clearly their safeguarding responsibilities. They check the school's procedures regularly to ensure that staff are following national guidance and taking account of any recent changes.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Improvements in the quality of monitoring, support and challenge have resulted in better teaching and assessment in the current year across the school. This is helping pupils to make good progress.
- Teachers build good relationships with their pupils and make learning fun. Their high expectations of behaviour are reflected in pupils' positive attitudes towards learning and their hard work in lessons.

- Teachers plan work that is often linked to a central topic, such as 'Brazil' in Year 6, helping to make learning purposeful. Effective new approaches to teaching English and mathematics are having a positive effect on pupils' learning. Teachers follow carefully the school's new curriculum guidance in these subjects, which means that activities are closely linked to pupils' prior learning and follow a clear sequence.
- Early reading skills are taught well. Teachers and teaching assistants have good subject knowledge in phonics. As a result, pupils are able to use their phonics skills confidently when reading new texts.
- Teachers have good expectations of pupils' progress most of the time. In many classes, teachers respond quickly when pupils, especially the most able, are ready to have their learning moved on in English and mathematics. However, this is not the case in all classes, weakening the progress of these pupils over time.
- In subjects such as science, history and geography, there is sometimes a lack of challenge for the most able because pupils often start with the same piece of work, whatever their ability.
- Teaching assistants are well trained and provide good support for all pupils, especially those with SEND. They are given work tailored to their individual needs. Adults ensure that these pupils are fully included in all classroom activities.
- Homework is well established and enjoyed by pupils. They especially like the way that teachers use 'home learning' to help to prepare them for a new topic before they start it in class.
- Parents are very positive about the quality of teaching. They say that they especially liked the approachability of teaching staff. As well as the regular written reports, staff are readily available if parents wish to talk about a particular issue.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and are keen to do well. They like the personal attention that they receive from staff as well as how their learning is explained thoroughly to them at the start of lessons.
- Pupils report that the encouraging feedback they get about their work, and the focus on their emotional well-being through 'mood cards', 'help you to aim high' and 'to concentrate on the right things'. This positive attitude towards school is very apparent in the way pupils persevere diligently with their tasks and sustain concentration for extended periods.
- Pupils feel safe at school. As one commented, 'We are like one big family.' They know who to talk to if they have a worry. Adults quickly access additional support if it is needed to help pupils.
- Pupils talked confidently about work they had completed on e-safety, road safety and the dangers of substance misuse and knife crime. They are well informed about the different forms of bullying, including the impact on others of racism, sexism or

homophobia. School records show that there is some occasional bullying but it is tackled well by leaders.

- Pupils show high levels of respect and care for each other, valuing their classmates' opinions and working cooperatively in lessons. They have some opportunities to take responsibility around school but this is comparatively underdeveloped. For example, pupils would like more opportunities to contribute their ideas about how to improve the school through a school council or a similar forum.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- There is a harmonious atmosphere at the school which is reinforced by positive relationships between the pupils and the staff. Pupils understand what is expected of them and how they will be rewarded for behaving well. They feel that this year's new behaviour policy has had a positive impact. Consequently, pupils conduct themselves well throughout the school day.
- Pupils are kind and considerate to each other in the dining hall and when moving around the school. They work hard and take care to present their work neatly.
- There is a happy atmosphere on the playgrounds, with pupils using play equipment sensibly. On the infant playground, pupils take great care to ensure that their play does not disturb others. This is occasionally less evident on the junior playground, where play is sometimes boisterous.
- Rates of attendance are broadly average. The vast majority of pupils attend regularly and arrive at school on time, ready to learn. Leaders are proactive in tackling poor attendance. They continue to work closely with outside agencies and families to improve the attendance of the very small number of pupils who are more persistently absent.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Leaders have responded decisively to the drop in attainment last year that resulted in it being below average at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics. A detailed scrutiny of pupils' books, visits to lessons and in-school data show that the school's actions to tackle weaknesses are proving effective. Currently, progress across the school is good. Pupils are quickly acquiring a good range of skills, knowledge and understanding across the curriculum because they are being taught well.
- Pupils read and write confidently. The school has revamped how reading and writing is taught and have given pupils clear guidance through their 'Gold Standards' about what they should be learning from year to year. This is helping them to quickly improve skills and to develop a love of reading. Pupils write enthusiastically, showing a good sense of audience and using basic grammar, spelling and punctuation rules accurately. They have plentiful opportunities to use their writing skills across the curriculum and do so enthusiastically.
- Pupils make good progress in phonics. The proportion reaching the expected level in the screening check by the end of Year 1 has been rising and, in 2018, was broadly

average. Pupils, including those who find reading more difficult, use their phonics skills confidently to break down words and to help them read.

- In mathematics, younger pupils count confidently. By Year 6, pupils successfully apply their number skills to carry out investigations when, for example, working out the area of shapes.
- The most able make good progress most of the time, although some teachers miss opportunities to move their learning on more quickly when they have fully grasped a concept and are ready to try something new.
- Pupils with SEND make good progress. Tailored programmes cater successfully for pupils' social, emotional and academic development through well-focused one-to-one support both in and out of class.
- The school is currently prioritising improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. While recent developments are already having a good impact, their progress remains uneven across the school. Consequently, while there is a much improved picture in the current Year 6, the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils nationally remains too large in some year groups.
- As well as making good progress in English and mathematics, pupils are beginning to achieve well in other subjects. Pupils' books show that most pupils make good progress in science, history and geography, although the most able are not always challenged well enough.
- In physical education, pupils develop good skills, reflecting the desire of leaders to ensure that teaching does not focus just on developing skills in numeracy and literacy.

Early years provision

Good

- Children are well prepared both socially and academically for life in Year 1. They start school with skills and abilities which are usually lower than those typical for their age. They make good progress overall, developing new skills and knowledge especially quickly in the Reception class. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of the early years has been improving and was above the national average in 2018. The attainment of boys and girls was equally strong because the curriculum is adapted well to differing needs.
- Relationships across the early years setting are very good. Teachers focus successfully on children's personal, social and emotional development. Children behave well and feel safe. Children settle quickly in the Nursery because they are given calm and sensitive support. In both classes, children learn to work hard and to do their best all of the time.
- Teaching supports children to make good progress. In the Reception class, the teacher and other adults provide particularly stimulating work that is closely matched to individual need. In this class, there is a very strong focus on introducing new vocabulary and accurate pronunciation. Children are encouraged to talk about their learning and how they will check their success when, for example, discussing making a fruit kebab using the colour sequence of a rainbow.
- The curriculum is well planned to take account of children's interests. The well-resourced outdoor areas are used imaginatively to help children improve skills in the

different areas of learning. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to self-select where they are going to work. This is managed particularly well in the Reception class. For example, adults track where children are working so that they can be certain they are trying out different activities over a week. In the Nursery, while there is much good practice, adults need to ensure that tasks are purposeful and completed as intended.

- Support staff have a good effect on children's learning most of the time. However, the quality of interventions through questioning is not yet consistently strong, especially for the most able. This means that there are some occasions when the learning of these children is not moved on quickly enough.
- The early years provision is well led and managed. The early years leader is a highly skilled practitioner. She monitors provision carefully and has a clear understanding of the next steps, including identifying strategies for extending her often exemplary practice into the Nursery.
- Parents are pleased with the quality of the early years provision. They feel welcome in school and are happy that their children are so happy. The views of parents were summed up by one who commented, 'My child settled really quickly in the Nursery and cannot wait to get to school each day.'

School details

Unique reference number	117252
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10086779

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	228
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Helen Jarvis
Headteacher	Debbie Shirley
Telephone number	01707 320610
Website	www.homerswood.herts.sch.uk/
Email address	head@homerswood.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	4–5 June 2015

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school with eight classes. Children in the early years are taught in a Reception class and a Nursery, which is open for mornings only.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is broadly average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is broadly average.
- There have been a large number of staff changes over the past two years. The headteacher was absent for significant periods time in the last five terms. Both the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher are new to their posts in the current academic year.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed pupils' learning in lessons, many of which were observed jointly with the headteacher. In addition, the inspectors made several short visits to observe learning at other times.
- Discussions were held with pupils, staff and members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors took account of the views of 43 parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also talked with parents at the start and end of the school day.
- The inspectors listened to pupils read and looked at their work and school documents, including: the school's own information about pupils' learning and progress; planning and monitoring documents; the school development plan; records relating to behaviour and attendance; safeguarding information; and health and safety documentation.
- The inspectors analysed responses to inspection questionnaires from 24 members of staff and 40 from pupils.

Inspection team

Mike Capper, lead inspector

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