

Dereham, St Nicholas Junior School

Gilpins Ride, Littlefields, Dereham, NR19 1BJ

Inspection dates 11–12 June 2015

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|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Requires improvement | 3 |
| | This inspection: | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Leadership and management | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | | Good | 2 |
| Quality of teaching | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Achievement of pupils | | Requires improvement | 3 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Leaders, managers and governors have not improved the school with sufficient momentum since its previous inspection to move it to good. There remain inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Teaching is not yet good. The most-able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged and do not achieve as well as they could.
- Teachers do not always make clear to pupils how they can improve their work when marking. Sometimes they do not make sure pupils have acted upon their advice.
- There are occasions when pupils do not deepen their understanding because teachers do not ask them sufficiently probing questions.
- Achievement in writing requires improvement; pupils do not write long enough pieces of work across different subjects.
- Too many pupils still write untidily, despite this being an area to improve at the previous inspection.
- Plans for improving the school are not set out in a way that helps leaders to check that improvement is rapid enough.
- Some parents justifiably feel that the school could do more to communicate effectively with them about its work and how well their children are getting on.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils are making better progress this year as teaching has improved.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make generally good progress because the school meets their needs well.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and behave well. They have a good understanding of how to stay safe.
- The governing body has increased in effectiveness and begun to challenge school leaders robustly.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed learning in 38 lessons or parts of lessons, 12 jointly with the headteacher. The inspectors also attended two assemblies.
- The inspectors heard pupils read and, with the headteacher, looked closely at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspection team looked at a wide range of school documents, including development plans, policies, self-evaluation reports and safeguarding records. They considered evidence of the school's partnership work and the information provided for families.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils chosen at random. Discussions were held with senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers and other staff. The lead inspector talked to the Chair of the Governing Body, four other governors and a representative from the local authority. He also held a telephone conversation with the deputy headteacher, who was in the Lake District.
- The inspectors took account of the 36 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and of the school's own survey of parents. They also spoke informally to parents.
- The inspectors considered the seven staff questionnaires that were completed.

Inspection team

Nick Butt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Piers Ranger

Additional Inspector

Debra McCarthy

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school. There are four classes in each year group.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority) is above average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment by the end of Year 6.
- During the inspection, most of the Year 6 pupils, the deputy headteacher and the year group leader for Year 6 were on a residential visit in the Lake District. On the second day of the inspection the Year 3 pupils hosted Year 2 pupils from the three feeder infant schools.
- The school has published proposals to become a sponsored academy in September 2015 with the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make teaching consistently good so that:
 - the most-able pupils are sufficiently challenged
 - marking enables all pupils to know exactly what they need to do to improve their work
 - teachers always make sure pupils have acted upon their advice
 - all teachers use questioning effectively to extend pupils' understanding.
- Raise achievement in writing by ensuring that:
 - pupils have more opportunities to write longer pieces of work, especially in different subjects
 - all pupils write neatly.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - increasing the pace of improvement to make teaching and achievement securely good
 - ensuring plans for improvement set out stages by which targets will be reached over time so that leaders can evaluate how rapidly they are being met
 - improving communication with parents so that they are clear about the school's work and how well their children are doing.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because teaching and achievement are not yet consistently good. While there have been improvements since the previous inspection, the rate of improvement has not been fast enough to move the school to good.
- Staff have taken on board many new initiatives in the past two years, including putting in place the revised National Curriculum and new approaches to assessment. Some of these are at an early stage of development and not yet having a full impact on driving improvement.
- Leaders have built upon the school's caring ethos, which values everything a child can achieve. Pupils respond well to this and their personal development and behaviour are good. They enjoy being at school and are confident to try out new ways of working.
- Subject leaders are confident about their responsibilities and are involved in checking the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. They identify strengths and areas to improve. However, they are not yet fully effective as some inconsistency remains in the quality of teaching and achievement in their areas.
- Leaders have clear plans for improvement, which set targets to be achieved. While these plans set out when work should be completed, they do not currently identify the stages along the way that would show progress towards meeting the school's aims. As a result it is harder for leaders to be sure that plans are being implemented at a good pace.
- The pupil premium has been used increasingly effectively this year to close gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school. The school ensures that these pupils are involved in all activities and have the same opportunities as the others. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
- The curriculum has brought subjects together in common themes to make learning engaging and relevant for pupils. It promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding well. For example, Year 3 pupils, as Goldilocks, wrote a letter of apology to the three bears for the problems she had caused. This helped to make them aware of the consequences of our actions for others.
- The school's 'values for life' are closely aligned to British values such as fairness and tolerance. Pupils learnt about democracy in action through running a mock general election. They learn about different cultures and religions through their work. Year 3 pupils have studied China and Year 6 have studied Brazil. The school prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders have received some good support from the local authority, both through participating in its 'Norfolk good and great' programme and with data.
- The primary physical education and sport premium has been spent on training for staff, additional clubs such as Taekwondo and tennis and specialist teaching. This has resulted in pupils participating more widely in a greater range of sports and teachers becoming more confident in taking physical education lessons.
- Most parents are happy with the school and feel their children are doing well. However, several say that they feel the school could communicate with them more effectively about what is going on, and how well their children are doing. This came through both the school's own questionnaire, Parent View and from parents in the playground. Inspectors agree with these parents' views.
- The school makes sure that all safeguarding arrangements are met and are effective. It keeps careful records of staff and ensures that all checks are carried out.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The effectiveness of governors has improved. They have reviewed their work and written their own

action plan. Governors bring a range of expertise to the school, and are active in supporting and challenging leaders. They understand about data and how pupils are doing compared with others nationally. They know what teaching is like. Governors are involved in managing teachers' performance. They reward good teaching and see that any underperformance is tackled. They keep a close eye on spending. Governors hold leaders to account for pupils' performance and are now asking more searching questions as they seek to drive up the school's effectiveness.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They have positive attitudes to learning. They are polite to staff and visitors. They respond well to instructions and are enthusiastic in class. In the playground pupils play happily and show consideration for one another.
- No time is wasted coming into class. Pupils settle down quickly to work. They take their responsibilities as members of the school council and prefects seriously. They support the school well in promoting environmental projects such as caring for the woodland areas.
- While most pupils take a pride in their work, the presentation and handwriting of some is too untidy. This is one reason why behaviour is not outstanding.
- The very large majority of parents who gave inspectors their views are happy with behaviour.
- Attendance is a little below average. The school has a new attendance support officer who is working with families to raise the profile of attendance and tackle persistent absence. This is beginning to have a positive impact.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say that bullying is not an issue. They have a strong understanding about different types of bullying such as cyber bullying. They know that there are adults they can turn to with any concerns.
- Pupils learn about e-safety and how to keep safe when using social media. Parents agree that their children are safe at school. The school works well with vulnerable pupils and provides good levels of support for them and their families.
- The school is innovative in the steps it takes to ensure pupils' good awareness of safety. For instance, a club is raising girls' awareness of body image and how the media presents it; as a result they are informed about resisting the pressures of the age that can lead to anorexia, for example.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because, while improving, it is not yet consistently good. Teaching has not yet led to good progress for most pupils.
- While some teachers ask probing questions to assess what pupils know and to extend their learning, this is not always the case. Some teachers do not follow up pupils' responses incisively enough to stretch their thinking.
- The teaching of writing has improved. There is a greater emphasis on spelling, punctuation and grammar this year. While the school has taken steps to improve handwriting this is still uneven in places. Pupils join Year 3 with varying approaches to handwriting. Books show that pupils are writing across different subjects. However, sometimes they do not write long enough pieces of work.
- There are positive relationships between adults and pupils. Pupils are keen to learn. Teachers often make

learning enjoyable for the pupils and plan lessons that interest and involve them. In Year 4, for example, pupils were learning about food chains. They were making notes about consumers and predators in preparation for a piece of writing.

- Stimulating displays celebrate pupils' achievements and ideas. Teachers use teaching assistants well to support pupils' learning. The most effective teaching assistants show initiative and expertise in meeting pupils' needs.
- Pupils read daily. They say they enjoy reading and can talk about their favourite authors. Pupils' awareness of phonics (the sounds that letters represent) varies when they enter the school. They become more accomplished in reading by Year 6. The school has invested in a new online reading programme, but it is too early to see the full impact of this yet.
- Pupils have plenty of opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in solving real-life problems. This year the school has adopted some new approaches to teaching mathematics to deepen pupils' understanding. These have helped lower and middle ability pupils to build on a firm foundation. They have also thrown up some prior gaps in knowledge, which the school is working to fill.
- At times, the most able pupils are not given the chance to deepen their understanding as soon as they are ready to move on. This slows their progress.
- Teachers regularly mark pupils' work and give them points for improvement. On occasions, these can be rather general, such as 'need to focus more'. When this happens, it is difficult for pupils to accelerate their learning. Pupils are routinely acting upon the advice using 'purple pen'. However, teachers do not always check the pupils' responses and their mistakes sometimes go uncorrected.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because too few pupils make consistently good progress from their different starting points. Pupils join Year 3 with standards that are broadly in line with the national average. The school has not added enough value to their attainment by the time they leave in Year 6.
- Achievement has varied over time but is now improving. In 2014, standards for Year 6 pupils were broadly average in reading and writing but below average in mathematics and spelling, grammar and punctuation. Too few pupils made expected or more than expected progress from Key Stage 1. This was because pupils had not made sufficient progress in earlier years in the junior school and this had not been picked up quickly enough by staff.
- The present Year 6 are doing better. More are on course to make expected and more than expected progress, and the proportions on target to achieve these measures are in line with the 2014 national figures. Their attainment is also on track to be in line with the 2014 national average. This is because teaching has improved and the school is more alert to pupils who may be at risk of falling behind. There is a greater rigour in how any underperformance is tackled to make sure that pupils make at least expected progress. However, pupils are not yet exceeding the performance of pupils nationally.
- In 2014, there were considerable gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and the others in the school. These pupils were around four terms behind the others in reading and three-and-a-half terms behind the others in writing and mathematics. Compared with other pupils nationally, disadvantaged pupils were around four terms behind the others in mathematics and reading and just over three-and-a-half terms behind in writing.
- More effective support for disadvantaged pupils this year, including from qualified teachers, means that their progress has improved and gaps have narrowed between these Year 6 pupils and their classmates to less than half a term in reading and mathematics. In other year groups the progress of disadvantaged pupils varies. It is stronger in Year 3 than in Year 5.

- The achievement of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is generally good from their different starting points. Leaders are identifying pupils' needs more precisely and tailoring programmes of support to meet them effectively.
- The progress of the most able pupils requires improvement. This is because sometimes they are given work that is too easy for them and do not achieve as well as they could. In 2014, too few pupils reached the highest levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. Improvements in Year 6 this year mean that more of these pupils are on course to make expected progress.
- The school has introduced its new assessment system for the revised National Curriculum in Years 3, 4 and 5. This is yet to be fully established, so it is too soon to judge its impact.

What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
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| 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

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| Unique reference number | 121115 |
| Local authority | Norfolk |
| Inspection number | 462072 |

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

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| Type of school | Junior |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 7–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 403 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Sonja May |
| Headteacher | Neil Toplis |
| Date of previous school inspection | 11 June 2013 |
| Telephone number | 01362 693876 |
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