

Widford School

Ware Road, Widford, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 8RE

Inspection dates

2–3 February 2017

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	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Not enough pupils make the progress of which they are capable in key stage 2, especially in mathematics.
- Governors rely too much on the headteacher for information about the school's performance. Governors do not do enough to assure themselves of the accuracy of this information. This limits their ability to provide precise challenge.
- Governors do not hold school leaders to account well enough for the spending of pupil premium. They do not analyse and check the impact of this funding on the progress that disadvantaged pupils make.
- Subject coordinators are not given sufficient opportunity to develop their skills. Consequently they are not as effective in their roles as they should be.
- Teachers' use of assessment to plan learning that closely matches the needs of pupils is inconsistent. In some classes the expectations of most-able pupils are not high enough.
- Pupils are not provided with regular enough opportunities to edit and redraft their writing. Consequently, they are less accomplished at improving their work.
- Information for parents about what their children are learning in all subjects is not kept up to date on the website.
- Although the small numbers of Reception children are well looked after, they are not provided with enough opportunities to excel and exceed expectations in reading, writing and number.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils are well cared for. They have positive attitudes to their learning and many are very proud of their school.
- Pupils participate in a wide range of sports. They compete successfully with other local schools and develop their sporting skills well.
- Pupils behave well and maturely. Lessons proceed easily and without interruption, because pupils are diligent and focused.
- Pupils are polite and highly articulate. Older pupils particularly enjoy the wide range of subjects they learn, such as cookery.
- The teaching of reading is a strength and pupils have an enjoyment of reading. Pupils of all ages are listened to read regularly.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is strong. Pupils are respectful and celebrate each other's successes easily and well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - monitoring and evaluating robustly the progress that pupils make in writing and mathematics so more make good progress from their starting points
 - ensuring that assessment processes and procedures are accurate and fit for purpose
 - developing the effectiveness of subject coordinators so they can drive forward school improvement.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment information effectively to plan learning that meets the needs of pupils in mixed-aged classes
 - providing learning activities that ensure that the most able pupils use and apply their skills in a range of different ways so that more are able to excel in mathematics
 - providing regular and effective opportunities for pupils to edit and redraft their writing so more can reach greater depth by the end of key stage 2.
- Improve outcomes in the early years by:
 - ensuring that children have interesting and stimulating opportunities to exceed expectations so children make good progress from their typical starting points, particularly in reading, writing and number.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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

- Since the previous inspection, school leaders including governors have not ensured that the school has continued to improve. Their self-evaluation of the school's performance is over-generous. Leaders' actions and plans for improvement are not monitored well enough to bring about rapid and sustained change. Consequently, the progress that pupils make continues to be mixed. Too few make good progress from their typically average starting points.
- The headteacher takes responsibility for whole-school assessment information. Although plans are in place to replace the system, the school's current assessment practice is not rigorous and effective enough. Due to a lack of precision in assessment, leaders are not able to take timely action when pupils fall behind. This is particularly the case in mathematics.
- Information about pupils' progress is analysed solely by the headteacher. As a result, subject coordinators for English and mathematics, who are capable of securing whole-school improvement, have not yet had training and regular opportunity to be effective in their work.
- School leaders have not ensured that the pupil premium is used well enough to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make good or better progress. Inspection evidence confirmed that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is mixed and not routinely considered by leaders and governors.
- The long-serving headteacher remains passionate about the well-being of every individual in school. Her value of 'children first' can be seen in the positive and caring relationships she and other adults have with pupils. Pupils are well cared for.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is a strength. Pupils are tolerant, respectful and friendly with each other. In an assembly seen, pupils listened well and applauded enthusiastically as their friends explained their week's learning and achievements.
- All parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are happy, safe and well cared for. One parent commented in a free text that 'the staff are very committed and genuinely care about the welfare and learning of the children'.
- The leadership of the very few pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective and ensures that there is equality of opportunity. Individual needs are carefully considered and staff deployed well to offer the appropriate support that these pupils require.
- Sports premium is used well. Pupils have wide and varied opportunities to develop their skills. During the inspection, older pupils took part in a local small schools competition. They were proud of their success and the badges they earned.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced. Older pupils commented that they particularly enjoy design and technology, where they were developing their cooking skills as part of their South American topic. In Years 1 and 2, pupils develop

their practical scientific skills well through investigations and experiments. In lessons and assemblies, pupils learn effectively about what it means to be a good citizen in modern Britain. Pupils told the inspector that they learn some subjects, such as French, through whole-school 'muddled up' days, which they appreciate.

Governance of the school

- The governing body has relied too heavily on the information provided by the headteacher relating to the performance of the school. Governors have not done enough to assure themselves that the information they receive is accurate. Consequently, they do not have the depth of understanding that they require to provide highly effective challenge.
- Governors have not ensured that the website reflects the wealth of opportunities that pupils receive. The website does not inform parents well enough about the curriculum and what their children learn in each subject.
- Governors' oversight of the impact of pupil premium funding lacks rigour. As a consequence, they are not well placed to ensure that that this additional funding has maximum impact on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.
- Governors are dedicated and committed to the work of the school, under the leadership of the experienced chair of governors. They have well-considered plans in place to improve their effectiveness but it is too soon to assess the impact.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Governors ensure that appropriate checks for the recruitment of staff are in place and documented appropriately. Staff are suitably trained and have recently completed their online training concerning radicalisation and extremism.
- Staff are aware of how to deal with concerns they may have regarding a child's welfare. School records indicate that leaders have dealt with very few issues of concern for a number of years, so it is not possible to assess the impact of their system. Child protection records are securely and appropriately filed.
- Governors are appropriately trained in their safeguarding duties and have all the necessary suitability checks in place. They ensure that policies are updated.
- Pupils understand the distressing impact of bullying in a variety of forms. Pupils spoken to could name an adult that they would be happy to speak with if ever there were an instance of bullying or they felt unsafe. Pupils were certain that any issue would be dealt with quickly and well.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is variable. Despite areas of strong practice in key stage 1 and upper key stage 2, the whole-school approach to assessment lacks consistency and accuracy. Therefore, pupils do not make enough progress across key stage 2. This is particularly the case in writing and mathematics.

- The school's chosen strategy for teaching mixed-age classes is not executed effectively enough. For example, in lower key stage 2, the older and most able pupils often listen to the same explanations as the younger and lower-attaining pupils. This results in neither group making the good progress they should.
- Although pupils write frequently and diligently, they do not have sufficient opportunities to edit and redraft their work. Consequently, pupils are less familiar with what they need to do to improve.
- The quality of teaching in mathematics requires improvement. Most-able pupils are not provided with enough opportunities to use and apply their numeracy skills in a range of different ways, so more of them can excel.
- Teachers' deployment of additional adults in the classroom is variable. Where they are used well, small groups of pupils receive targeted support during lessons so they can improve their work. For example, in key stage 1 a teaching assistant worked well with the Year 2 pupils during a phonics lesson, making sure that each individual understood their learning. As a result, these pupils worked at the pace and standard required to make better and accelerated progress. This good practice, however, is not consistent in all classes.
- Where practice is most effective this is because adults have appropriately high expectations of what the pupils can achieve. For example, pupils' books in upper key stage 2 demonstrate that pupils receive carefully and systematically planned learning opportunities so they can excel in a wide range of subjects. These pupils take an obvious pride in their work and present their learning to a high standard.
- The teaching of early reading is effective. Adults skilfully question all pupils so they practise their sounds and explain their understanding well. Results in the Year 1 phonics screening check still vary each year and this is another indication of the lack of rigour in the whole-school assessment system rather than the small numbers in a cohort.
- Older pupils read exceptionally well. Pupils who read to the inspector confidently explained their understanding. Older pupils demonstrated an infectious enjoyment of the books they were reading. Reading records show that pupils of all ages and abilities are heard reading in school on a regular basis. Pupils' achievement in reading is strong by the end of key stage 2.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils want to learn. They work diligently even when the activities are dull or limit the progress they can make. When expectations are high and tasks suitably demanding, pupils rise to the challenge and many are able to exceed the expectations for their age.
- Pupils take the responsibilities they are given seriously and maturely. For example, at lunchtimes older pupils help with the organisation of the dining hall. Pupils stated that they have helped to reduce the queues and lunchtimes are now 'smoother' and 'improved'.

- Pupils are confident and have positive and respectful relationships with adults and each other. During special assemblies, the youngest children in the school ably stand and present their work to pupils and parents. Pupils are particularly proud of the certificates that they receive.
- Many parents commented positively about the way in which the school staff care for their children and that staff are approachable. The positive relationships between staff and pupils are a strength of the school.
- Adults ensure that pupils have a wide range of experiences. Pupils develop their skills in subjects such as sport and music effectively and well. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about their success in a recent sports competition with other rural schools. Similarly, some pupils were attending a singing event in London.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite, well-mannered and were extremely keen to talk with the inspector about their work and school life generally. School records, which indicate very few incidents of poor behaviour, show this positive behaviour to be the norm at Widford School.
- Pupils typically attend school well. They are punctual and settle quickly to their morning routines. Pupils are met at the school entrance each morning and welcomed by the headteacher. One parent commented about 'the warm welcome that awaits every child when they arrive at school in the morning'.
- Pupils conduct themselves well during the school day. They move around the school safely and well. Breaktimes and lunchtimes are positive social occasions. Pupils use the large playgrounds well, devising their own games. They enjoy practising their climbing skills on the new apparatus.
- All staff who responded to their questionnaire and the vast majority of parents agreed that pupils are well behaved. Inspection evidence supports this.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The progress pupils make in writing and mathematics is not consistently good. This is because leaders are not rigorous in analysing both published and school assessment information and setting robust targets for pupils so that they can excel. Assessment information is not used well enough to enable leaders to intervene when a pupil starts to fall behind or when a pupil needs to be challenged to achieve even more.
- In 2016, by the end of key stage 2 pupils had made less progress than other pupils nationally with similar starting points in writing and mathematics. The progress pupils made in writing was in the lowest 10% found nationally. In 2014 and 2015, pupils did not make as much progress as others nationally by the end of key stage 2. Current information shows that pupils make strong progress in Years 5 and 6, but some pupils have too much ground to make up from lower key stage 2.
- The small numbers of pupils in each cohort mean that outcomes can appear to fluctuate from year to year. This academic year, pupils are set to attain well, though the progress that pupils make from their key stage 1 starting points remains an issue for some pupils.

- There were too few disadvantaged pupils to report on their achievement in 2016 without identifying individuals. Across the school, however, the progress that disadvantaged pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics is variable. This is because leaders have not targeted the additional funds carefully enough so that these pupils can achieve the standards of which they are capable.
- In 2016, pupils in key stage 1 achieved broadly in line with national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of pupils who reached greater depth was above national averages in all three subjects. Most-able pupils make good progress in key stage 1. Their books show that these pupils complete activities well and diligently.
- In 2016, pupils achieved in line with national expectations in science in key stage 2 and above expectations in key stage 1. Pupils' books demonstrate a wealth of learning, providing pupils with regular opportunity to develop their investigation and observation skills through practical work.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Children start Reception with individual skills and abilities that are generally typical for their age. Results fluctuate year on year, but for two of the last three years, the proportion of children who have left the early years with a good level of development has been below the national average. In 2016, more children left achieving the expected level but no child exceeded the national expectations for their age, particularly in reading, writing and number.
- Due to the very small numbers of the part-time Nursery and Reception children this academic year, it is not possible to report on their work without identifying individuals. Children are happy and safe in the early years environment that they share with the separately run pre-school. Parents say that they are pleased that their children have a place at the school.
- At times, adults' expectations of what Reception children can achieve are too low and staff are over-nurturing. Adults do not use the assessment information from learning journeys well enough to plan activities that precisely meet the needs of the individuals in these small classes so that they make rapid progress.
- Children have opportunities to practise their writing skills. One child was able to spell her name, her friend's name and explain that names began with capital letters. Although leaders have made writing an improvement area this year, there was little evidence of children's writing on display around the room. Evidence in learning journeys shows that all children follow the same activities and there was no evidence to demonstrate where children are provided with additional interesting opportunities to excel.
- Children behave well and are keen to learn. Over the inspection, they spoke to the inspector confidently and enthusiastically about their learning. They were particularly proud of their design and making of a doll's house. Each child confidently explained their section of the house and why they had chosen to make the items inside.
- Children have access to an extensive outside area that is well organised and developed. Children enjoy using the gardening tools and developing their weighing and

measuring skills in the water tray. Over the course of the inspection, opportunities for Reception children to practise their writing and counting skills were less evident. In learning journeys this aspect of their learning outside was also seen less.

- Staff work well with parents to welcome new children into the school. As a result, children settle easily and quickly become confident learners.

School details

Unique reference number	117176
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10023450

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	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	60
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Austin
Headteacher	Diane Penn
Telephone number	01279 842681
Website	www.widford.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@widford.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–15 March 2013

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information on its website regarding how it effectively uses the pupil premium funding, nor does it provide enough information about what pupils learn in all curriculum subjects on its website.
- This is a very small rural school with four mixed-age classes.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. All pupils speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for additional support from the pupil premium funding is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below national; the proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is above the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Her Majesty's Inspector observed learning in all classes and over a range of subjects. Some of these observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, middle leaders, subject coordinators, governors and a group of pupils. A telephone conversation was also held with an external consultant who works for the local authority.
- Her Majesty's Inspector analysed and evaluated a range of documentation, which included information about pupils' attendance, achievement and behaviour records, school self-evaluation and school improvement planning, safeguarding, the curriculum, governor meetings and the monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The teaching of phonics was observed and pupils listened to reading.
- The views of 23 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, were considered, as well as 16 free text comments. Parents' views were also informally sought on the playground over the course of the inspection. Her Majesty's Inspector also took account of the views of five pupils and five staff who responded to their online surveys.

Inspection team

Kim Hall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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