

Water Hall Primary School

Fern Grove, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK2 3QF

Inspection dates

12–13 February 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders, including multi-academy trust (MAT) leaders, have not done enough to stem the decline in standards, which has been rapid and far-reaching.
- School and trust leaders' oversight of how well pupils behave, learn and achieve has been weak. School leaders' evaluations have been far too generous.
- Trust leaders have not done enough over time to strengthen leadership in the school.
- Pupils do not achieve well enough, especially in reading. Key weaknesses in teaching mean that current pupils' progress is poor, including that of disadvantaged and most-able pupils.
- The curriculum in some subjects does not enable pupils to acquire subject-specific skills and knowledge.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are not supported well enough in their learning and some flounder in class.
- Teaching is particularly weak in a number of classes. Across the school, teachers' subject knowledge is underdeveloped and teaching sometimes introduces misconceptions, including in phonics.
- Some new approaches to improving reading, writing and mathematics are not having the necessary impact.
- Behaviour is poor in some classes. It prevents pupils from learning.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders new in post at all levels are clear about the school's weaknesses. Senior leaders are determined to improve the school.
- Trustees have recently made changes aimed at improving leadership in some areas of the school. It is too early to judge the impact.
- Safeguarding is strong. Processes are effective, and leaders work well with external agencies.
- Staff are supportive of the school. A number also provide additional care for individual pupils. This aspect was praised by some parents.
- Teaching in Year 2 and in some classes in upper key stage 2 is stronger than elsewhere.
- Learning in early years is better than other areas and improving.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise expectations across the school of how hard pupils should work, how well they should behave and the standards they should achieve in their work.
- Strengthen leadership capacity, including the effectiveness of trustees, by ensuring that:
 - trustees have a more in-depth knowledge of the school and use it to hold the local governing board and school leaders to account for how well pupils achieve and behave
 - any improvements, including new approaches to teaching, are stringently monitored and evaluated
 - assessment processes are accurate and leaders across the school have a clear overview of pupils' progress
 - pupils with SEND are suitably overseen and monitored so that they receive the additional support they need from teachers and assistants
 - pupil premium funding has a more positive impact on the learning and progress of disadvantaged pupils
 - the curriculum in a range of subjects, including in science, enables pupils to acquire subject-specific knowledge and skills, as well as broaden their vocabularies.
- Implement an approach to developing teaching so that:
 - teachers' subject knowledge improves, including their understanding of pupils' misconceptions and how to tackle them
 - the teaching of reading across the school, including phonics, is more effective
 - work is more appropriately pitched so that most-able pupils are challenged.
- Improve pupils' behaviour and the overall culture of the school by:
 - ensuring that pupils do not disrupt the learning of others through their behaviour in class
 - strengthening leaders' oversight of behaviour and developing teachers' skills in managing challenging behaviour
 - making sure that incidents of bullying are dealt with more effectively so that they do not recur

- implementing a whole-school approach to improving the language pupils use when communicating with each other.
- Improve pupils' outcomes by ensuring that:
 - teaching and the curriculum enable pupils to make strong progress across a range of subjects
 - SEND pupils make better progress from their starting points
 - disadvantaged pupils make strong progress so that they can fulfil their academic potential and catch up with others nationally
 - most-able pupils make the progress of which they are capable, so that they achieve at a higher standard.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to improve this aspect of leadership and management.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to improve this aspect of leadership and management.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Leaders, including trust directors and trustees, have not done enough to halt the decline in academic standards and the deterioration in pupils' behaviour. The interim headteacher and deputy headteacher are very new in post. They can identify weaknesses accurately but have not yet made a positive impact. They are determined to put things right, acknowledging that some areas of the school require a lot of improvement.
- Expectations of what pupils can achieve, how well they should behave and how hard they should work are too low. Leaders have not set the bar high enough. Until recently, leaders' evaluations of the school have been too generous and areas of weakness have not been tackled.
- There have been gaps in leadership in the school and some aspects of leadership are still ineffective. For example, leaders' overview of pupils' progress, including the progress of pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils, is weak because they have not ensured that teachers' assessments are accurate. As a consequence, the school's assessment information paints too positive a picture of pupils' attainment and progress. This has led to some poor progress going unchecked and pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, not fulfilling their potential. Leaders have not used additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils effectively enough.
- Leaders do not have a clear enough overview of which aspects of teachers' practice are strong and which require further development. Processes for monitoring and evaluating teaching, learning and assessment are underdeveloped.
- The leadership of teaching, including staff training, has been ineffectual. There is currently no coherent strategy for improving teaching. Some subject leaders are enhancing their own expertise through external courses, but this has not yet led to improvements in the quality of teaching. In the past, some newly qualified teachers (NQTs) have not been given the support they require. New senior leaders are now beginning to provide better support for newly qualified teachers, but this is at an early stage.
- Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum enables pupils to overcome the academic barriers which prevent them from achieving, such as gaps in vocabulary and poor language skills. For example, the reading curriculum does not enable pupils to embed phonic knowledge, build up a rich vocabulary over time and access challenging texts. In addition, the wider curriculum does not provide opportunities for pupils to acquire subject-specific knowledge and skills across a wide range of subjects, including science, history and geography.
- Approaches to ensuring pupils' good behaviour have been poorly led and managed. Leaders new in post rightly see this as a priority. Leaders have not analysed information on incidents of poor behaviour to identify patterns, nor have they analysed data on exclusions. Leaders have not focused enough on developing teachers', including NQTs', expertise in managing challenging behaviour. Current approaches are

not effective and involve pupils being repeatedly removed from class and missing out on their learning.

- Overall, the leadership of SEND is not effective, despite the fact that a director from the MAT with expertise is now working part-time at the school as special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). She has an accurate overview of the strengths and weaknesses in the provision and has begun to tackle some of the failings. However, she currently has not got the capacity to make the far-reaching changes necessary and to monitor their impact. There is currently no oversight of the additional help that pupils receive, including support provided through funding. Leaders are not clear enough about the effect of additional help on targeted pupils' learning and progress.
- Staff are positive about working at the school and are committed to supporting pupils and their families. For example, they make sure pupils have a school uniform and are provided with breakfast and equipment. Leaders have not analysed the impact of the different support they provide for pupils and families to establish what works best. The capacity to provide support for families has recently been reduced due to changes in staffing.
- The school is developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. However, some aspects are better developed than others. For example, pupils praised the reflection activities that they access at the start of the day and at other times when needed, as well as trips to local places of historical interest to broaden their horizons. However, some social and moral aspects need further development. For instance, the language used and attitudes displayed by some pupils are not considerate and kind.
- Additional sports funding is not overseen well enough; this is partly due to the fact that leaders have not got the capacity to carry out this aspect of their roles. There is a lack of clarity as to what the funding can be used for and some activities that have benefited from the funding have not been carefully evaluated. As a result, leaders cannot provide a convincing analysis of the impact that the funding has had on pupils' overall sporting skills and fitness.
- It is recommended that the school should not appoint NQTs.

Governance of the school

- In the past, trustees have been too focused on strengthening operational aspects of the MAT and ensuring that it is financially stable. They have not had a detailed enough oversight of how well pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, achieve, as well as pupils' behaviour. Their limited knowledge of the school has meant that they have not always challenged leaders well enough and have been too accepting of what they have been told.
- More recently, trustees have rightly identified that leadership capacity in the school is weak, and they have plans to strengthen leadership within the school. These plans have not yet had an impact.
- Trustees and members of the local governing board have a range of relevant expertise, but they do not have enough educational expertise. This has meant that they have not fully grasped some of the more complex educational issues in the school, such as variations in the progress of different groups of pupils and in the quality of teaching.

They are not clear enough about how to monitor and evaluate leaders' work in these areas.

- Trustees have not overseen the work of the local governing board well enough. Some members of the local governing board are not sufficiently aware of the features of good governance.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and safeguarding is given a high priority in the school. Processes and procedures work well and are carefully overseen. Trust leaders with expertise are making a positive impact on this aspect of the school's work. They are well attuned to the issues that are most prevalent in the community. Leaders work closely with local authority social care officers to ensure that children and families receive the support they need in a timely manner.
- Leaders have a great deal of expertise in supporting families and there is a small team dedicated to this work. Members of this team support families in many different ways, including assisting them with any problems that may prevent pupils from coming to school and learning, such as housing and transport issues. Much of their work also supports individual pupils' well-being and mental health.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- In most classes in both key stages, teaching is poor and does not enable pupils to learn. In a small number of classes, teaching is better. Nevertheless, across the school, teachers' subject knowledge and use of assessment are not effective enough. Some new approaches to teaching are not yet having the intended impact.
- Leaders have introduced new approaches aimed at supporting pupils in structuring their creative writing, which are beginning to have a positive impact. However, they are not embedded across the school. Teachers do not have a consistently clear understanding of how to develop pupils' writing. Older pupils do not use their reading to inspire the style and content of their own writing.
- Teachers' assessments are too generous, especially of writing. Teachers focus too much on whether grammatical and punctuation features have been included rather than the overall quality of the writing.
- Teaching does not support pupils well enough in acquiring new vocabulary. Recently introduced approaches to improving vocabulary are not having the intended effect. They focus on pupils using the thesaurus to search for more adventurous vocabulary. However, pupils do not understand how to choose words that are appropriate for the purpose, audience and context of their work. As a result, their choices do not enhance the quality of their expression. In addition, pupils do not remember the words they select from the thesaurus nor their meanings, and so their vocabulary repertoire is not extended.
- Some tasks are not pitched appropriately. Most-able pupils are often frustrated because they have to complete a lot of low-level work before moving to harder tasks.

- Teaching does not routinely enable pupils to gain a good grounding in new mathematical concepts. This is because teachers do not always build on pupils' prior learning and in some cases their own subject knowledge is not strong, including their knowledge of decimals and fractions.
- The teaching of reading, including phonics, is not effective. Pupils' phonic knowledge is not consistently embedded so that they can apply it when reading unfamiliar texts and some phonics teaching does not adhere closely enough to the chosen scheme. Too often, pupils do not access texts that are challenging enough in order to develop their stamina for reading.
- Teaching in Year 2 and in some classes in upper key stage 2 is generally stronger because teachers have strong relationships with pupils and can get the best out of them. They question pupils closely and challenge them to explain their answers. In these classes, teachers insist that pupils work hard and have introduced successful approaches to aid pupils to share their ideas effectively.
- Teaching in the wider curriculum is weak overall. Teachers set tasks that too often focus on enabling pupils to practise their cross-curricular skills rather than develop subject-specific knowledge. For instance, pupils in topic lessons were set the task of creating an advert for a Stone Age house. The task did not develop their knowledge of how people lived in the Stone Age and reinforced some misconceptions about the Stone Age.
- Pupils with SEND are not supported well enough in class. Teaching assistants spend a disproportionate amount of time with a small number of pupils who have complex needs and, therefore, cannot always provide other pupils with SEND with the help they need. Teachers are not clear enough about the adjustments they need to make for pupils with SEND so that they can access the tasks they are set. Some pupils with SEND struggle significantly in class and show signs of stress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare overall is inadequate. However, the additional care provided for individual pupils and their families is effective.
- Where teaching is weak, pupils' responses to learning are openly negative and have a detrimental impact on the overall culture of the class. In these classes, pupils do not focus on their work; they talk over the teacher and do not get on with the tasks that they have been set.
- Some pupils told inspectors that they are not stretched enough by the work teachers set them and do not concentrate on their learning as a result. However, where teaching and learning are more purposeful, pupils engage well and are keen to succeed.
- Pupils sometimes use derogatory language when they interact with each other during lessons. The atmosphere in these classes is antagonistic and not conducive to learning.

- Some pupils and parents told inspectors that bullying, both physical and verbal, was not dealt with well enough. Records indicate that leaders do not follow up on incidents of bullying well enough.
- The work of staff dedicated to supporting families is far-reaching and makes a positive difference to individual pupils' welfare and well-being.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate. Some pupils' behaviour is poor and some are aggressive. Pupils reported to inspectors that there was, at times, fighting in class, which, although stopped by class teachers, happened again.
- Pupils told inspectors that, in some classes, learning is regularly disrupted by other pupils' misbehaviour and, although teachers try to deal with this, their approaches are not effective.
- Parents' views about behaviour are polarised. Some parents feel there has been a decline in behaviour and are concerned that it is having a negative impact on pupils' learning. Others are more positive.
- Last academic year, attendance was broadly in line with that of other pupils in primary schools nationally. However, some groups, such as pupils with SEND, had levels of persistent absence which were well above those of other pupils and above national averages for the group.
- Although strategies to tackle low attendance have been implemented, the impact of these approaches is not routinely monitored because leaders do not consistently track the attendance of different groups of pupils. The family support team works closely with targeted families to improve persistent absence and this work is having some success. However, attendance overall has declined when compared with the same point last academic year. This is largely because of a small number of pupils who are persistently absent due to medical reasons.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Pupils' outcomes have declined due to weaknesses in teaching and pupils' behaviour. Together, these factors have had a detrimental impact on pupils' attainment and progress.
- Current pupils' progress across a range of subjects is weak because teaching and the curriculum do not develop pupils' subject knowledge and skills. The standards pupils achieve in subjects other than English and mathematics, including in science, are very low. Year 6 pupils leave school without sufficient knowledge and skills in history, geography, science and languages to make a good start in their secondary school education.
- According to published performance information, key stage 2 pupils' progress and attainment have declined when compared with last academic year. In 2018 national tests, key stage 2 progress scores were significantly below average in reading and mathematics. This was a sharp drop compared with 2017, when they were significantly above average in these subjects. In key stage 2 national tests in 2018,

pupils' attainment also declined and was below average, especially in mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils' attainment was well below that of other pupils nationally and others in the school.

- Most-able pupils do not achieve highly enough and in both key stages the proportion of pupils exceeding the expected standards in national assessments in 2018 was below average.
- Pupils in key stage 1 attain better than pupils in key stage 2, as shown by 2018 national assessments. However, key stage 1 results in 2018 declined compared with 2017, when their scores were above average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- In 2018, there was a drop in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check, and it fell to below the national average. The proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the check when they re-sat it in Year 2 was also below average. Current pupils' progress and attainment in phonics are weak.
- The school does not carefully track the progress that different groups of pupils make from their starting points. Work in books and evidence from observations suggest that pupils with SEND make particularly weak progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils' achievement is weak. This group does not make the rapid progress they need to fulfil their potential and catch up with others nationally.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Early years is improving. Although it is better than other aspects of the school, it is not yet good. The early years leader has a well-defined vision of how she would like the setting to develop. However, she currently does not have sufficient capacity to monitor thoroughly the work of other adults in the setting nor to gain a detailed overview of the progress of different groups of children.
- Children enter the school with levels of development below those seen nationally. Last academic year, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development was well below average and was particularly low for boys despite some making strong progress from their starting points. Current children are generally making good progress towards early learning goals.
- The early years leader knows the overall strengths and weaknesses in the setting well and has carefully considered plans for next steps. However, due to lack of capacity, her checks on staff in the provision are not effective enough. They take place during the summer term, when capacity can be organised. By this time, it is too late for any improvements to have an impact on current Reception children. Inspectors observed some variations in the teaching of phonics, with some practice that might lead to misconceptions that had not yet been addressed.
- Adults record children's attainment and any variance across the different areas of learning is identified. However, leaders responsible for early years do not have a clear enough overview of the progress of different groups, such as boys. These groups often need to make rapid progress to catch up with their peers.

- Children in the early years develop positive attitudes to learning and show increasing levels of independence. Adults use their assessments well to group pupils so that learning can be targeted to meet children's needs.
- Both the outside and inside learning environments are interesting and stimulating. For example, an area has been set up as a supermarket for role-playing. There are many other opportunities for children to develop their knowledge and skills in number and early writing.
- Some adults are strong role models for language development, but others less so. Where practice is strongest, adult role models extend children's language and demonstrate sounds well. Children mimic adults' pronunciation, which in turn helps to develop their phonic skills. However, there is not a sufficiently coherent approach to developing children's vocabulary so that new words are introduced in a carefully sequenced way by all staff.
- Children interact well with one another, running, climbing and playing imaginatively. A range of interesting and stimulating activities is set up outside, including sand, climbing, water-play and a mud kitchen. Children develop their dexterity and physical aptitudes through these activities. However, sometimes adults do not intervene promptly enough to further develop children's knowledge and skills when playing. As a result, children's play activities do not always move their learning on well enough.
- Effective support is in place for the most vulnerable groups. Children are well looked after in the setting and they are safe.
- Parents receive regular feedback. There are strong plans in place to extend how much parents contribute to children's learning. School leaders acknowledge that this aspect of the provision needs further development.
- Children feel settled and secure. There is a carefully planned transition into school and into Year 1. However, due to lower-than-average attainment, some pupils are not well prepared for the demands of the Year 1 curriculum.

School details

Unique reference number	143264
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	10084270

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	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	297
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Ms Lucy Abbott
Interim headteacher	Mrs Karen Roberts
Telephone number	01908 377833
Website	waterhallprimary.co.uk
Email address	karen.roberts@lakesacademiustrust.org
Date of previous inspection	13–14 March 2013

Information about this school

- Water Hall Primary School is the lead school in the Lakes Academy Trust, which also comprises Knowles Primary School. The school converted to become an academy in September 2016. The predecessor school was graded outstanding at its previous inspection in March 2013.
- The current interim headteacher is also the director of education for the trust. She took up the interim headteacher role at the start of February 2019. The current deputy headteacher joined the school at the start of January 2019.
- The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, with a local governing board that oversees the day-to-day running of this school. The chair of the local governing board is a trustee, as is the chief executive officer of the trust.
- This is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Over one third of pupils are disadvantaged, which is well above the national average.

- Nearly half of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and about one third speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND who are supported by the school is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by education, health and care plans is slightly below average.
- About a quarter of pupils join or leave the school at times other than the usual dates for admission.
- Children in early years are taught in separate Nursery and Reception classes. Currently, 21 children attend the Nursery on a part-time basis, with provision offered for morning or afternoon sessions.
- In key stage 1, there is a Year 1 class, a mixed-age Years 1 and 2 class and a Year 2 class. In key stage 2, pupils are taught in mixed-age classes: there is a Year 3 class, a mixed-age Years 3 and 4 class, a Year 5 class, a mixed-age Years 5 and 6 class, and a Year 6 class.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors made visits to observe learning in all classes, including in the wider curriculum. On most occasions, but not all, they were accompanied by senior leaders. Samples of pupils' work were scrutinised by inspectors on two separate occasions. On the second occasion, the interim headteacher joined the lead inspector.
- Inspectors met with two different groups of pupils. On the second occasion, they heard pupils read. Meetings were held with the interim headteacher and the deputy headteacher. Inspectors held separate meetings with senior leaders, who also lead English and mathematics; the SENCo; the chair of the local governing body, who is a trustee; and the chief executive officer of the MAT, who is also a trustee.
- Inspectors also met, separately, with leaders responsible for early years, safeguarding, PE and sport premium funding, behaviour and attendance, and supporting families. They also held a meeting with NQTs and separately with a small group of staff, which included teaching assistants. Inspectors met informally with parents at the end of the school day.
- Documentation and policies, which included the school's own evaluation, development plans and pupil progress information were reviewed. Inspectors scrutinised the school's safeguarding records, including safety checks made when teachers are appointed, pupils' records, a letter from the local authority regarding the school's response to a safeguarding issue, and a selection of pupils' and teachers' files.

Inspection team

Sarah Hubbard, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Clare Haines	Ofsted Inspector
Becky Greenhalgh	Ofsted 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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