

Richard Whittington Primary School

Thornbera Gardens, Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire CM23 3NP

Inspection dates	22–23 March 2016
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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Richard Whittington Primary has improved since the previous inspection. All weaknesses identified then have been tackled quickly and effectively.
- School leaders, including governors, know their school well and have made important changes. Their determination moves the school forward.
- The headteacher and assistant headteachers have created a culture of high expectations for all, resulting in significant improvements to the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.
- The governing body is effective. Governors have an accurate view of the school. They successfully challenge and support school leaders.
- Teachers guide pupils to reflect on the progress they have made and the next steps in their learning. Each pupil is challenged with work neither too hard nor too easy. As a result, pupils of all ages make consistently strong progress, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teamwork is very effective. Teachers share ideas and learn from one another. They work closely with teaching assistants, too.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Pupils are well prepared for secondary school.
- The curriculum interests and stimulates pupils' curiosity and thirst for learning.
- Pupils behave well and the school is an orderly community. They work together harmoniously.
- Behaviour for learning is equally strong; pupils are increasingly active participants in their learning.
- Pupils say they feel safe and happy at school, and that they are well cared for.
- Children arrive in the early years inquisitive and ready to learn. They settle quickly, thrive, make good progress and enter Year 1 fully prepared for the next stage in their education.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Foundation subject leaders do not have all the information they need to monitor their subjects.
- The training given to teaching assistants is too broad to help them in their particular roles.
- Some parents feel the school does not communicate well with them, for example when they have concerns.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all foundation subject leaders:
 - implement effective ways to gather all the information they need to monitor their subjects
 - use the information gathered to drive forward any necessary improvements.

- Further develop the effectiveness of teaching assistants by providing training more precisely matched to their individual needs and the roles they each undertake.

- Strive to further improve communication with parents so that:
 - channels of communication, including the website, engage parents more
 - they feel their concerns are listened to
 - they receive the information they need about their children's progress to fully support their learning out of school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Governors, staff and parents say that the headteacher is pivotal in the many improvements made to the school in the recent past. One parent said, 'Nothing stands still with this headteacher, it is all about improvement.' He has led improvements in all of the areas identified at the previous inspection. As a result, all of these areas are at least good and some, for example how teachers check pupils' understanding in lessons and reshape the lesson if necessary, are now strengths of the school.
- The governors and headteacher's strong determination to appoint only high-quality teaching staff is a fundamental foundation of the school's improvement.
- The staff share and fully commit to the school's aspirational vision. Despite the vast majority being new since the previous inspection, teachers combine well to form a strong team. Whether in their academic or personal development, pupils are continually urged to challenge themselves to do better.
- The school's clear ethos is the foundation on which important improvements are built. In everything it does, the school lives its aim of 'together everyone achieves more'. Staff give all pupils the opportunity to thrive.
- Senior leaders and governors regularly and robustly monitor the work of the school, ensuring that they identify and make the improvements essential to move the school forward.
- School action planning clearly outlines precisely what needs doing, and by when, to ensure actions are carried out in a timely fashion.
- Leaders' strong arrangements for checking on the quality of teaching accurately identify how teachers can improve. Teachers benefit from training matched closely to their needs, and rigorous performance management drives improvement in teaching and learning.
- Teaching assistants fulfil essential roles in teaching and learning, a significant change since the previous inspection. They are effective, particularly in lessons. The thorough groundwork they have received since the headteacher's arrival has prepared them well for the daily roles they participate in, such as teaching phonics (how letters link to the sounds they make), using questioning effectively and supporting pupils in their general classwork. However, it is not precise enough to fully prepare them for some of the extra catch-up programmes they teach. In addition, although their performance is managed so that their individual needs are identified, they do not always receive the training they need.
- The headteacher and assistant headteachers form a very effective team with complementary skills. All see the quality of teaching as key to the school's effectiveness. For that reason, both assistant headteachers are class teachers, so other teachers can see high-quality teaching in action, and learn from them.
- Subject leaders' good knowledge and expertise is used with increasing effectiveness, particularly in English and mathematics. For example, they review the quality of learning in pupils' workbooks. However, foundation subject leaders have yet to develop ways to check how pupils are progressing, and then use this information to make changes if necessary.
- The provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability is led and managed effectively. Pupils' needs are accurately identified and parents fully involved. The leader keeps a watchful eye on the impact extra help has on pupils' progress, and plans changes where necessary.
- Support staff, under the clear leadership of the business manager, ensure that the school runs smoothly and efficiently.
- The curriculum is effective, designed to enable pupils to link learning across subjects so their understanding is clearer. Numerous opportunities for writing enable pupils to practise and hone their skills. As a result, writing standards have improved. In every lesson, staff urge pupils to challenge themselves. This benefits all pupils, but particularly the most able, who thrive on the opportunity to stretch themselves. Staff make effective use of visits and visitors to widen pupils' understanding. Pupils are very enthusiastic participants in the wide range of clubs.
- Pupils' good preparation for life in modern Britain is built on a thorough understanding of democracy, for example, through the process of nominating and electing pupils for the school council. Nominees' self-confidence grows when they explain what they have to offer to other pupils. They appreciate that staff and governors listen to, and take note of, their views.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very well promoted through the rich and diverse curriculum. For example, pupils consider the rights and wrongs of deforestation, understand the impact of earthquakes on people in those regions affected, and empathise with them. Special events, such as their participation with many other schools in the 'young voices' mass choir, contribute strongly, too.

- Leaders effectively target the use of the additional pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils where it is most needed. A clear plan, with measurable targets, ensures that the money makes a difference, both to pupils' academic and personal development.
- The primary school sports funding is used effectively. Pupils enjoy a wider range of sports activities, including 'tag' rugby. Parents say how much their children enjoy the increased competitions with other schools. The take-up of clubs has tripled over the last three years. Pupils have a clear understanding of the importance of exercise to healthy living.
- The school works closely with other local schools. Staff benefit from shared expertise, for example in checking assessments. Pupils benefit from opportunities to work with pupils from local schools, for example the most-able mathematicians enjoy weekly problem-solving lessons at the high school.
- The local authority supports the school well and has been instrumental in the improvements made since the previous inspection. Training for key staff, for example, has been crucial.
- The partnership with parents is generally strong. The vast majority of parents responding to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, would recommend the school to another parent. However, about one fifth of parents responding to the survey say that they would like more information about their children's progress, and a quarter feel the school does not respond well to concerns they raise, for example about homework.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body has responded very positively to the findings of the review of governance, and is now a strength of the school.
 - Governors demonstrate the same ambition and determination as senior leaders to ensure the impetus for improvement remains rapid. They are not afraid to take difficult decisions.
 - Individual governor's skills and expertise are used effectively and whenever possible governors look for new members with additional skill sets.
 - Governors closely analyse the progress of all pupils to ensure that they do well and to question and challenge leaders when they do not.
 - Staff performance, including that of teachers, is rigorously managed. Governors ensure that decisions about pay increases are well informed by a good range of evidence from the robust challenge and support provided to staff.
 - Oversight of the school's finances, including the use of additional funding, is meticulous. Governors help to ensure that good value for money is achieved.
 - Governors visit regularly and know the school well, for example through talking to pupils and staff. They use this information effectively to produce plans to improve the school further. Current plans include engaging parents more and improving the website.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. School leaders ensure that all training is up to date. The school fully complies with the latest safeguarding guidance. Governors and all school staff are highly aware of their duty to keep pupils safe. Response to any concern is immediate. Good relationships with external agencies ensure that leaders know who to refer to should they need guidance. The school works closely with parents to ensure that their children are well supported and safe from harm. The vast majority of parents responding to Parent View expressed confidence that their children were safe at the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching is consistently good. Information including the school's own rigorous checks on teaching, confirmed by the local authority, show that teaching has improved since the previous inspection.
- Teamwork among staff is very effective, despite the high levels of turnover since the previous inspection. Learning from one another is a strong feature of the staff. Teachers work in teams, sharing ideas and expertise, to ensure all pupils enjoy a similarly high-quality curriculum.
- Staff exemplify the behaviour expected of pupils. Pupils respond very positively to the staff's consistent use of the clear rules and routines. Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. As a result, the school is orderly and no time is lost in lessons.
- Pupils learn well because teachers give immediate feedback, so any mistakes or misunderstandings are corrected quickly and the most-able pupils, who clearly understand, are given harder work. Teachers, in line with the school's policy, give pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work, and the time to do so. Teachers' lesson planning is effective because they base each lesson on a thorough assessment of pupils' learning in the last.

- Teachers encourage pupils to be reflective learners and take some responsibility for the progress they are making and the approach they take. For example, pupils are encouraged to select the equipment they might use to help them solve mathematical problems.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work very closely together, to the benefit of pupils. Teaching assistants are very effective in class because they learn from the teachers they work alongside and put into practice the generic training they have received.
- Pupils' speaking and listening skills develop well because they are regularly asked to explain their thinking and talk about their learning. As a result, they learn to articulate their thinking well.
- Reading is taught well. Phonics is taught accurately, with close attention to detail such as the shape of the mouth. Reading lessons include well-thought-out activities to extend pupils' understanding and practise other key skills such as handwriting and grammar.
- Writing is also taught effectively. Staff follow the school's approach closely and consistently; they check pupils' prior knowledge, build their teaching around this, and check after a few weeks that they have retained the learning. Pupils say they like this approach because they can see for themselves the good progress they make.
- Teachers develop pupils' mathematical understanding well. Most lessons include opportunities for pupils to apply their new learning to solve real and relevant problems, often based on their interests.
- Teachers and their assistants use questioning effectively to clarify and extend pupils' understanding. They generally ask probing questions and try different approaches if pupils do not understand.
- Pupils show pride in their work and present it neatly in their books. Their conscientious approach, and pride in their work, is clear. They respond well to their teacher's clear expectations.
- Learning at home effectively supports school work. Pupils practise and consolidate work done in school, or undertake projects that give them opportunities to decide for themselves how to respond.
- The vast majority of parents responding to Parent View agree that their children are well taught at Richard Whittington School.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The overwhelming majority of parents responding to Parent View feel that their children are happy at school. In their discussions with inspectors, pupils all said they enjoy school.
- Pupils understand the benefit of 'together everyone achieves more'. In discussion with inspectors they explained it as, 'We get more done if we work as a team,' and, 'Team means trying to help one another.'
- Pupils take an active role in their own learning. The school's approach to feedback fully involves them. As a result, they know their own strengths to build on and areas to improve. Pupils are asked to discuss ways they can help one another to express concerns and worries, rather than waiting for adults to notice.
- Pupils enjoy the increasing opportunities to play a part in their school. Trained play leaders, for example, help those younger than themselves, particularly the early years children just joining Year 1.
- Pupils' awareness of safety is good because it is explained in many everyday lessons and topics they study. E-safety is strong and regularly reinforced in lessons. Pupils say just before each holiday they are reminded about staying safe.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school. The vast majority of parents responding to Parent View agreed. Pupils are confident staff will listen to them if they are worried. They say there is very little bullying or name-calling and that it is dealt with very quickly and effectively, so there is no repetition.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong, and respond positively to the school rules. They are very orderly when moving around the school.
- The school is very inclusive. New pupils have 'helping buddies' to see that they settle in. One recently arrived pupil said, 'This is a safe school if you are different.'
- In classes and assemblies, staff teach pupils to be thoughtful about their own behaviour and to think about how it might affect others before they act.
- Attendance overall is above average and the downward trend in recent years reversed. The school checks attendance thoroughly and moves quickly when it drops so that pupils do not get into bad habits. The school

works very closely with external agencies to help the families of the very small number of pupils who are regularly absent.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils' achievement has improved since the previous inspection. The quality of teaching is much more consistent so progress, year-on-year and particularly in Years 3 to 6, is stronger. The overwhelming majority of parents responding to Parent View agree their children make good progress.
- The school's checks on progress, and the quality of work in pupils' books, show that pupils currently in the school are making good progress overall in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards in these subjects are consequently rising further.
- Changes made by school leaders, including governors, are effective. Throughout the school they are leading to faster progress and higher standards. This has a cumulative effect. For example, the thorough grounding in Nursery and Reception means pupils join Year 1 able to do more advanced work, so they achieve more by the time they start Year 2. As a result, achievement by the end of Year 2 is good.
- In 2015, the proportion of Year 6 pupils reaching or exceeding the expected standard in reading and mathematics was broadly average. In writing it was below average, although in the skills of grammar, punctuation and spelling it was above average. These pupils generally made slower than expected progress over the previous four years. This is because, while the quality of teaching is now good, it has not been consistent over time.
- Pupils' progress in reading is good. In 2015, the proportion of pupils reaching or exceeding the expected standard in the Year 1 screening test was well above the national average. School information and inspection evidence indicates that results this year will continue to be high. Elsewhere, effective use of reading sessions enables pupils to draw inferences and make predictions about characters and events.
- Progress in writing is good because the school leaders responded quickly and effectively to last year's Year 6 results. Pupils better understand different writing types, such as persuasive and instructional, because the tasks they are given frequently use them in real and relevant activities in other subjects. The high standards in grammar, punctuation and spelling have been maintained and, with good handwriting, underpin the current good progress.
- Progress in mathematics is strong because once pupils understand, they are immediately given more challenging tasks to deepen their understanding. Teachers build their understanding, for example by training pupils to look for patterns in their answers.
- The small proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium generally make good progress. This additional funding is used effectively to give each pupil the support needed. As a result, those among the most-able pupils thrive and do well while those who struggle are catching up.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability make good progress overall from their differing starting points. The needs of these pupils are accurately assessed, a recent improvement, so they get extra help matched closely to the specific area they need to concentrate on. When teaching assistants have the precise training they need to teach these programmes, they are highly effective.
- A word used frequently with and to all pupils is 'challenge'. Staff aim for every pupil to be working at the cusp of their learning, and to take responsibility and pride in this. As a result, all pupils who relish the opportunity, but particularly the most able, flourish.
- The small proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups make progress at least as good as their peers, and often better than this. They settle quickly in the school's inclusive community and thrive. Those who speak English as an additional language also settle quickly, have the support they need from staff and other pupils and consequently do well.
- All pupils' progress is checked very regularly in reading, writing and mathematics, and the information used effectively, particularly to change the work they do if they are falling behind or if they are ready for more challenging work. This is an improvement since the previous inspection.
- As a result of their strong personal development, positive attitudes to learning and improving academic standards, pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their learning.

Early years provision

is good

- Most children enter Nursery with skills and knowledge typical for their age. They settle quickly and make good progress because they thrive in the nurturing and encouraging climate, and the activities they do are closely matched to their needs and interests. The good progress that the children make continues in Reception. Over the last two years the proportion of children reaching a good level of development has been above the national average and has increased year-on-year. The school's checks and inspection evidence suggest this improvement will continue this year. As a result, children enter Year 1 well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- Children have a thirst for learning. Each morning they arrive keen and eager, full of curiosity to see what interesting and varied activities staff have planned for them.
- Children behave well. They know the routines and what is expected of them. They have a good sense of right and wrong, and always do their best. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
- Children's personal development is very good. They cooperate well with one another, share and take turns. Many of the school's learning approaches are introduced here, so from an early age children get used to using them. For example, children work effectively with their 'learning partners', such as when they listen and check each other's pronunciation of different phonetic sounds is correct.
- Children achieve well because the planning of activities is based on clear and accurate assessment of each child's needs. Significant achievements are recorded online, where parents can view them and have a 'real time' understanding of how their children are advancing. Parents say this gives them the opportunity to talk about their learning with their children the same day, and follow it up at home.

Both indoors and out, children experience a very wide range of stimulating activities, many beginning from children's own ideas. They become totally engrossed in exploring their interests. No limit is placed on their learning. For example, like older pupils they too participate enthusiastically in after-school clubs and energetic activities such as hockey.
- Staff form a strong team. They are vigilant; all Nursery and Reception children are safe and well cared for. Staff share ideas and expertise, to the benefit of all children. Staff fully understand how these young children learn and develop. The leader is a very effective practitioner. As with other leaders in the school, she demonstrates high-quality teaching to her colleagues. For example, how careful questioning develops children's thinking and leaves them with further questions or ideas to ponder and explore.
- Children and their parents are well prepared for the school's Nursery and these children transfer seamlessly into Reception. Links to other settings are good and include visits so other children joining Reception quickly settle in. Children and parents are equally well prepared for Year 1.
- Leadership is very effective. The new leader quickly recognised areas for improvement and made appropriate changes. Each child's progress, including the disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs or disability, is carefully checked to see all achieve well. Nursery and Reception classes are inclusive: activities are adapted and modified to meet children's differing needs.

School details

Unique reference number	117346
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10001910

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	335
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rob Halkyard
Headteacher	Antony Kern
Telephone number	01279 657778
Website	www.whittington.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@whittington.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–20 November 2013

Information about this school

- This school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Each pair of year groups is taught in three mixed-age classes; Nursery and Reception, Years 1 and 2, Years 3 and 4, and Years 5 and 6.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is below average. The pupil premium is additional funding provided by the government to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. Approximately one in every five pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, and one in ten speaks English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is below average.
- In 2015, the school met the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher, all other leaders and nearly all class teachers are new to the school.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- An independent breakfast club meets daily at the school; this will be subject to a separate inspection.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed pupils' learning in all classrooms, some with the headteacher or other members of the leadership team. In addition, inspectors observed small groups of pupils being taught.
- The inspectors looked at work in pupils' books and listened to pupils read.
- The inspectors attended assemblies and observed pupils as they moved around the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other leaders, teachers, and governors. The inspectors also spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors met with pupils to discuss their experiences at school.
- The views of 110 parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account. The inspectors also held informal discussions with parents.
- The inspectors looked at a range of school documents and information, including the school development plan, checks on the quality of teaching, curriculum plans, minutes of meetings of the governing body, and pupils' behaviour and attendance records. The inspectors also looked at arrangements and records for safeguarding procedures.

Inspection team

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Helen Bailey	Ofsted Inspector
Lynn Lowery	Ofsted Inspector

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