

Chalton Lower School

Luton Road, Chalton, Luton, Bedfordshire LU4 9UJ

Inspection dates

6–7 June 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher has successfully steered the school through a period of change, ensuring that outcomes for pupils remain good. She has built a team of effective middle leaders. They are taking a good part in securing improvement.
- The headteacher and her staff are ambitious for all pupils and are committed to the school's vision, 'Working together to be the best we can'.
- The governing body is supportive of the work of the school, but does not yet do enough to hold leaders to account for pupils' performance.
- From their different starting points, pupils make good progress across the school. They are well prepared socially and academically for the next stage of their education.
- Teachers make learning fun and ensure that pupils are able to work without fear of failure. They plan learning carefully, but there is sometimes a lack of challenge for the most able pupils.
- Children in the early years get off to a good start. A rich environment and skilled staff enable children to make good progress.
- Pupils behave well, feel safe in school and show care and consideration towards others. They work hard most of the time and are keen to do well. The school is a very harmonious, happy and respectful community.
- Teachers plan activities that interest and excite pupils. They make strong links between subjects, helping to make learning purposeful.
- Opportunities for pupils to practise and reinforce writing skills by using them in different subjects are patchy. Consequently, progress in writing is uneven and not consistently strong across the school.
- The school has a very strong partnership with parents. They are almost unanimously happy with the school.
- Rates of attendance have improved this year but are still below average. Although pupils thoroughly enjoy school, too many arrive late at the start of the day.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the monitoring processes of governors so that they hold school leaders to account with greater rigour.
- Ensure that the most able pupils are provided with a consistently good level of challenge that enables them to reach their full potential.
- Share good practice in the use of writing to support learning in different subjects so that progress in writing is consistently strong across Years 1 to 4.
- Work with parents to achieve higher attendance rates and to improve the attendance and punctuality of the small number of pupils who still too frequently miss school or arrive late.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher provides strong leadership. She has successfully steered the school through a time of turbulence in the last academic year, especially in Year 1 and 2. She constantly has the best interests of the pupils at heart and will take difficult staffing decisions where needed to help improve provision.
- The headteacher has established thorough monitoring processes. She is clear about what the school needs to do next to improve provision further. She evaluates the quality of teaching and learning accurately. This means that she is able to act quickly when monitoring identifies something that needs improving.
- Until this academic year, the headteacher has had to take on too much responsibility due to staffing issues. With new staff joining the school, responsibilities for managing subjects are now shared more widely. The headteacher is, therefore, beginning to focus more closely on working with governors to establish a long-term strategic plan for school development.
- The new middle leaders have hit the ground running. The headteacher gives them good opportunities to monitor provision for themselves, including observing their colleagues at work. Consequently, they have an accurate picture of the strengths in their subjects and are able to respond to any weaknesses. For example, the English leader has taken good steps to improve pupils' progress in writing by increasing the focus on spelling and grammar and by developing pupils' editing skills.
- Leaders effectively use physical education and sport funding to widen the range of activities on offer and to improve pupils' participation in sport. Funding has helped teachers to improve their skills, as they regularly work alongside the sports coaches. Pupils keenly take part in sports competitions. For a small school, participation rates in physical activity are high.
- The school uses its additional funding effectively to ensure that the small number of disadvantaged pupils receive support to help them improve their attainment. Their progress is monitored closely, and it is mainly good. However, leaders only compare attainment with other pupils in the school rather than making comparisons with national figures. This means that they sometimes have an overgenerous picture of the impact of in-school support.
- The curriculum is rich and varied. It provides pupils with many memorable experiences through visits and special events, such as a recent 'Viking Day' for older pupils. There is a high emphasis on teaching the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. In Years 3 and 4, the curriculum includes good opportunities for pupils to write purposefully in support of different subjects. However, this good practice is not seen as consistently in Years 1 and 2.
- The school strongly supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils show a mature understanding for their age of the importance of rules. They take a keen part in assemblies and happily raise funds for those less fortunate than themselves. Adults are constantly modelling core values, such as tolerance and respect.

They ensure that the pupils understand why such values are so important. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

- The school has a very strong partnership with parents. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to others. They like the caring atmosphere in school, typically commenting: 'It was a blessing to be able to send our children to Chalton,' and, 'For being such a small school, it offers the absolutely best you can wish for your children'.

Governance of the school

- Governors are highly committed to the school. They supported the headteacher well when there were staffing issues in the last academic year. However, following an external review of governance by the local authority in March 2018, they have recognised that they are not rigorous enough in their level of monitoring and challenge, especially with regard to how well pupils are performing in comparison to others both locally and nationally.
- Since the external review, the governing body has already taken steps to improve its effectiveness by, for example, seeking further training about how to analyse school and national performance data. However, improvements are embryonic, and the governing body does not yet do enough to hold the school fully to account.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- School leaders and governors create a safe culture by ensuring that policies and procedures are kept up to date. Leaders provide all staff with regular training, including new teachers joining the school. The training covers the 'Prevent' programme so that staff are aware of the need to be vigilant about the potential radicalisation of pupils.
- Staff are diligent about looking out for potential problems. They respond quickly when they have a concern. They maintain a safe environment by, for example, carrying out daily checks on outdoor play equipment.
- The governing body monitors safeguarding procedures carefully. They regularly meet with pupils to make sure that they feel safe and take immediate action if any problems are identified.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have a good knowledge of the individual needs of their pupils and they encourage them to work without fear of failure. They expect high standards of behaviour and pupils rise to this, showing a keenness to learn. Teachers reinforce expectations about behaviour calmly and effectively, and ensure that pupils are clear about what they are learning and why.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, especially in English and mathematics. Their strong phonics knowledge is used to plan interesting activities for younger pupils. As a result, pupils quickly learn to use the letter sounds to work out unfamiliar words.

- Teachers make good use of resources to make learning fun or to bring subjects alive. They use discussion effectively to check pupils' learning and to tackle misconceptions. This is especially effective in Years 3 and 4, where the teacher's probing questioning encourages pupils to think deeply about their learning. For example, during a discussion in this class, pupils rapidly improved their knowledge of place-value because the teacher probed their thinking to correct errors and to move learning on.
- Teachers plan work that is generally well matched to the needs of pupils, including the most able. However, there are times when the most able have work that is not sufficiently demanding and they soon finish it. As teachers do not always move the most able pupils on to the next task quickly enough, their progress is sometimes not as rapid as others.
- Teachers give pupils useful feedback about their work, both written and oral, that adheres closely to the school's policy. Teachers value pupils' responses. This inspires the pupils to try even harder. However, on occasions, teachers accept work that is not the pupils' best and do not always do enough to ensure that this is not repeated.
- Teaching assistants are deployed well to support groups, especially when working with pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. They are well-informed, sensitively helping pupils to improve their skills and knowledge.
- Parents feel that teaching is at least good. Teachers make good use of homework to extend learning. It is enjoyed by pupils and appreciated by parents.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are very happy at school and enjoy their work. They develop positive attitudes towards learning. They enjoy doing well and happily celebrate the successes of their classmates. They work hard, although occasionally they do not take enough care to present their work neatly.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They say that the school is a 'bully free' zone and report that occasional 'falling out' between pupils is sorted out quickly by staff. As one commented: 'We are like one big family.'
- Pupils understand how to be safe online and what to do if they have a concern. They produce e-safety posters that reinforce safe behaviour and show a good knowledge of the potential pitfalls of the internet. The school is located on a busy road, and even the youngest pupils explain how they must stay safe by using the traffic lights when crossing the busy road.
- Pupils develop good confidence by the time they leave school. They are respectful of the views of others and are happy to discuss their work and their experience at school. They are open about their opinions and can justify their viewpoints. They like taking responsibility, for example by being 'Young Leaders', although they feel the school council is ineffective because it does not meet regularly enough.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are polite and courteous. They conduct themselves extremely well when moving around school or working in lessons. They demonstrate good self-discipline both in and out of lessons. For example, they patiently await their turn to contribute to discussions in class and listen carefully to the views of other pupils.
- Pupils are friendly and kind and take good care of each other. There is a happy atmosphere at playtime, with pupils supporting each well. Pupils use play resources sensibly and take good care of their delightful school grounds. They play together sensibly without adult intervention.
- While improved slightly in the current year, rates of attendance are below average. A small number of pupils are persistently absent or arrive at school late. Although leaders are working hard to improve attendance further, there continue to be a small number of parents who do not support the school well enough in this aspect of its work.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In the current year, pupils are making good progress across the school from their different starting points. Although attainment varies from year to year because the number of pupils is so small, by the end of Year 4 most pupils are working at the expected standard for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. They are being well prepared both socially and academically for the next stage of their education.
- In 2017, attainment at the end of Year 2 was lower than usual in writing, being below average. The school acknowledges that staffing difficulties in the Year 1 and 2 class last year had an adverse effect on progress, resulting in some areas of the curriculum not being taught well enough. The school is providing good support for these pupils in Year 3 to help them catch up and to compensate for previous weaknesses.
- Across the school, pupils make especially rapid progress in reading. Pupils read with confidence for a range of purposes. Pupils in Year 2 are beginning to express preferences for authors or genre. They have very positive attitudes towards reading and quickly develop a love of books. Most pupils reach the expected level in national screening check at the end of Year 1 and Year 2. Pupils use their good phonics knowledge well to sound out new words when reading.
- Pupils' progress is slightly slower in writing than in reading. Although there have been improvements in the current year, not all pupils, especially in Years 1 and 2, have enough opportunities to practise and reinforce their writing skills by using them in the different areas of the curriculum.
- In reading, writing and mathematics, too few pupils reach the higher levels (greater depth) by the end of each year. The progress of the most able is uneven because they are not always enabled to improve their skills quickly enough.
- The school successfully ensures that the very small number of disadvantaged pupils make good progress over time. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive good support, enabling them to acquire new skills and knowledge quickly.

- In subjects other than English and mathematics, pupils produce some good art work and show good physical prowess in sports lessons. In Years 3 and 4, the quality of science work is good. Pupils develop a good range of scientific skills and have a good knowledge of the science topics that they have studied.

Early years provision

Good

- Children are well prepared both socially and academically in Reception for life in Year 1. Outcomes for children in the early years have improved significantly this year, with a higher proportion reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception year than in any of the previous three years. This reflects good progress from children's different starting points.
- The improvement in outcomes is the result of the good leadership of the new class teacher. Over the last year, there has been a good push for improvement. This has been based on a clear understanding of the priorities for improving provision further. The leader has suitable plans for future development and is well placed to see these to fruition once the class has moved into its newly built classroom in the next few months.
- Children are taught well. Adults have good knowledge of how young children learn. They take good account of the differing needs of the small number of nursery age children in the class and adapt work accordingly.
- Throughout the day, adults focus well on developing early numeracy and literacy skills. Phonics is taught in a fun and engaging manner. Consequently, children quickly improve their knowledge of the sounds that letters make.
- The teacher provides a rich and varied curriculum. Children get good opportunities to work and play outside, with activities focusing well on all the different areas of learning. Work is often linked around a central theme, helping to make learning purposeful. Thus, during the inspection, as part of their topic on looking after animals, children wrote information leaflets, developed their speaking and listening skills in the 'Veterinary Surgery' and made animal posters.
- Children are kept safe and behave well. They develop high levels of confidence and self-esteem. When working together they cooperate sensibly, taking good care of each other.
- There are good systems for assessing children's learning, including their attainment on starting school. Adults use this information well to provide the right level of challenge for children most of the time. However, just occasionally, the most able do not receive timely adult support in developing their ideas so that their skills can improve even more quickly.
- Adults have established strong links with parents. Detailed 'Learning Journals' give a clear picture of children's good progress over time and are a useful source of information to parents. They are very positive about early years provision, typically commenting: 'My children are getting a great start to school life,' and, 'My son cannot wait to get to school each day'.

School details

Unique reference number	109487
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10045771

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	61
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tracy Thomas
Headteacher	Liz Noble
Telephone number	01525 872 354
Website	www.chaltonlower.co.uk
Email address	chalton@cbc.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	2 April 2014

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average sized first school with three classes, two of which are mixed age: Years 1 and 2 and Years 3 and 4.
- Children in the early years are admitted in the term after their fourth birthday and are taught in the Reception class.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is below average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is below average.
- Two out of the three class teachers joined the school in September 2017.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed pupils' learning in lessons, many of which were observed jointly with the headteacher. In addition, the inspector made some short visits to observe learning at other times.
- Discussions were held with pupils, staff and members of the governing body.
- The inspector took account of the views of 20 parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. The inspector also talked with parents at the end of the school day.
- The inspector listened to pupils read, looked at their work and at school documents, including: the school's own information about pupils' learning and progress; planning and monitoring documents; the school development plan; records relating to behaviour and attendance; safeguarding information; and health and safety documentation.
- The inspector analysed responses to inspection questionnaires from eight members of staff.

Inspection team

Mike Capper, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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