

Roebuck Primary School and Nursery

St Margarets, Stevenage, SG2 8RG

Inspection dates

22–23 January 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes towards learning. They get along well together and attend regularly. They feel safe and valued.
- Children quickly settle into school routines in the early years. Provision is well organised and effective. Children are taught well in a safe and stimulating environment. They make good progress from relatively low starting points.
- The school is well organised and effectively led. Governors' support and work closely with the school. They provide a good level of challenge to hold leaders to account. School leaders know where improvements are needed and have clear, effective plans to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' attainment in all year groups.
- Pupils make good progress in all subjects and are well prepared for the next phase in their education. They leave at the end of Year 6 with attainment in line with national averages.
- Just one year into his headship, the headteacher has won the respect of parents, staff and governors. All staff feel valued and part of an effective team.
- The quality of teaching has improved and is routinely good. Teachers are enthusiastic. They have established strong relationships with their classes and make lessons fun. They expect pupils to work hard and they give them clear advice to improve their work further.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress due to effective support in class or in small groups. Disadvantaged pupils receive well-targeted extra help and are catching up with others in school.
- Pupils experience a broad range of subjects, enhanced by some exciting and stimulating trips and a good range of clubs. The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well and helps them learn about British values.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not always ensure that the most-able pupils are given activities that stretch them.
- Some questioning by teachers does not make pupils think hard.
- Boys do not reach the same high standards in their writing as girls.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors, together with a senior school leader, observed pupils of all ages engaged in a range of activities in different subjects. They looked at pupils' written work in all classes and records of children's learning in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other school leaders, two representatives of the local authority, and the Chair and five other members of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors spoke to two groups of pupils and, informally, with other pupils in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors examined several of the school's documents. These included the school's own evaluation of its performance and its improvement plan, information about pupils' progress and attainment, evidence about the quality of teaching, and records relating to behaviour, safeguarding and attendance.
- Inspectors took account of the 78 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and the views expressed by parents as they arrived at school. The 22 questionnaires returned by staff were analysed.

Inspection team

James McVeigh, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Annie Botfield

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school. There is one part-time class in the Nursery and one class in each of the other years from the Reception to Year 6.
- Just over four fifths of pupils, above the national average, are of White British heritage. The remainder come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds.
- At around 6%, there are fewer pupils than average who speak English as an additional language.
- Around a quarter of pupils, similar to the national average, are supported by the pupil premium. This is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- Around a fifth of pupils, just above the national average, are disabled or have special educational needs.
- The school hosts breakfast and after-school clubs.
- At the time of the inspection, major building work was underway to expand the school.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that:
 - the most able pupils are always engaged in activities that are suitably challenging
 - teachers pose pupils questions that will make them think hard.
- Raise boys' attainment in writing further to match girls' attainment by ensuring that lessons include more writing tasks that interest and motivate boys.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, who has been in post for four terms, has instilled a renewed sense of purpose and urgency into the school team. Staff feel valued and accountable for pupils' achievement. The headteacher is an excellent role model for staff and pupils alike. Parents, governors and staff say there have been significant improvements in pupils' progress and teachers' expectations. Attendance, the quality of teaching and pupils' progress have all improved, and the school shows good capacity to continue its improvement.
- The school runs smoothly and the governing body maintains a watchful eye on the impact of school leaders' initiatives. The headteacher has accurately identified what needs to improve and is well supported by the rest of the leadership team. Detailed planning reflects a determination to turn around areas of relative weakness, such as pupils' previous slow progress and the wide historic gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates. Information on pupils' progress and attainment is used effectively to identify pupils who need extra help. The strategy of recruiting teachers with specific responsibility for disadvantaged pupils has been effective.
- The quality of teaching has continued to improve. Leaders are rigorous in monitoring the quality of teaching. They use a good range of evidence to support judgements; for example, classroom observations, looking at pupils' work and their progress, and walks around the school. Ambitious targets are set for teachers each year and progression along the pay scales is linked to teachers' progress towards achieving these targets. A programme of support, including training opportunities, has been used to promptly tackle underperformance. Teachers regularly observe teaching in outstanding schools and there is a strong sense of teamwork and sharing of ideas.
- Subject and phase leaders are well supported in developing their leadership skills. They have opportunities to plan and provide training for others, and are responsible for ensuring continued improvement in their areas of responsibility. Several teachers are following advanced leadership courses. Through their coaching and monitoring programme, subject leaders have helped to bring about the improvement in the quality of teaching.
- Pupils experience a broad and balanced range of subjects, including music, art and French, as well as educational visits and trips. Pupils speak warmly of their experiences, such as playing steel pans, investigating a local river and visiting Whipsnade Zoo. Lunchtime and after-school clubs for such activities as cookery sewing, music and gymnastics, enhance pupils' experiences further.
- The school is effective in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development and highlighting British values. Pupils have the opportunity to consider and reflect on these areas through lessons, assemblies and links with other schools. For example, in one assembly, pupils learned about the electoral process in Britain and reflected on which pupil in their class most demonstrated that month's value of 'fairness'. They experience democracy in action when voting for their school council representatives and learn about different faiths and cultures in lessons, special theme weeks and visits to various places of worship. Pupils enjoy school life and are well prepared to take their place in modern Britain.
- The school ensures equality for all and will not tolerate discrimination. For example, the pupil premium fund is used to support disadvantaged pupils through well-focused extra help and in ensuring that eligible pupils can take advantage of other opportunities, such as trips and clubs.
- The primary sports funding has been used to promote greater participation in physical activity and sport, including tournaments and competitions. Specialist sports advisers are used to enhance the skills of staff in coaching, and to organise competitions and broaden the range of sports clubs available. The school checks to ensure that the numbers of pupils participating in physical activity are increasing.
- The school makes good use of the support from the local authority. Staff take advantage of training and coaching opportunities. Regular visits from an Improvement Partner provide an objective evaluation of the school's performance. The school embraces a local initiative to work closely with a local outstanding school

to share best practice in teaching and in leadership and management.

- The school communicates well with parents. Parents receive regular updates on their children's progress and have good opportunities to speak to teachers and see pupils' work. They get good advice on how they can help their children at home, including through regular workshops. In the 'Buccaneers' club, pupils have the option of a healthy breakfast and a snack after school, as well as the opportunity to participate in educational activities and socialise with schoolmates. Pupils are well prepared to start secondary school. Pupils in Year 6 learn about life in the 'big school' from their own teachers and have the opportunity to visit their next school to meet their new teachers and classmates.
- There is a strong focus on safety and security. Visitors are vetted and receive guidance on how to interact with pupils. All aspects of safeguarding are managed well.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors have ensured that the governing body has improved its range of relevant skills and continues to take training opportunities to maintain its effectiveness. The governing body knows and understands how well the school, its teachers and its pupils are performing. The headteacher's regular reports and their own focused visits provide good, up-to-date information. For example, governors are aware of pupils' slow progress in the past and of the historic gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others. Governors carry out regular surveys of staff opinions, and exit interviews with staff who are leaving, which inform them of teachers' experiences of the school.
- Governors provide a good balance of strong support and challenge to the school. They ask searching questions to make sure that the school continues to improve. They ensure teachers are set appropriate targets, particularly for pupils' progress, that teachers' pay awards are linked to their performance and that underperformance is tackled immediately.
- Governors handle school finances prudently and make sure that funds are spent effectively for the benefit of pupils. Governors understand their roles and responsibilities and make sure that they carry them out fully. They ensure that procedures for pupils' safeguarding meet statutory requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils' behave well in lessons and around the school. They are polite and considerate towards one another and adults. They listen carefully to their classmates in discussions and help each other out when necessary.
- The number of minor misdemeanours is low. Staff, parents and governors agree with pupils that behaviour is good.
- Pupils enjoy the range of equipment available at play times. They get along well with each other. Peer supporters, trained and eager, look out for any pupils who may not have anyone to play with and organise games for them.
- Pupils like their teachers and enjoy coming to school. Attendance has improved and is above average. The school promotes regular attendance well. A staff member liaises with families who find it difficult to maintain good attendance so the problem of persistent absenteeism has been reduced. The school works closely with the local authority to promote better attendance. Pupils are keen to gain full attendance certificates and earn gift cards, and classes like to win the 'highest attendance teddy' each week.
- Pupils have a positive attitude to learning. They know that their behaviour affects their learning. They generally stick to task when working alone or in groups, and take pride in the way they present their written work. Occasionally, when activities are not stimulating enough, a few pupils can become distracted and not concentrate so well.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say they feel safe at school. There is a good level of adult supervision in all the areas where pupils are working or playing. The site is securely

fenced and visitors are appropriately vetted.

- Teachers have ensured that pupils have a good understanding of the different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying. Pupils say that there is little bullying in the school and that teachers would sort it out quickly if it did occur. Name-calling or derogatory language is also rare. Pupils say that adults will not tolerate it. Pupils appreciate the chance to visit a supervised quiet room, 'the den', when they are unhappy, and the opportunity to post concerns in a worry box.
- Pupils have been taught how to keep themselves safe, for example, when using the internet or crossing the road. They have learned about balanced diets and the need for regular exercise.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and their work. Relationships with pupils are strong and class routines well established. Pupils respond to instructions promptly and feel valued and well cared for. Teachers often use gentle humour and try to make lessons fun for pupils.
- Teachers make use of a broad range of teaching strategies and often include opportunities for research and visual stimuli to motivate pupils. Video clips, and visits and visitors, are used effectively to spark pupils' interest. Pupils in a Year 5 history lesson showed great interest in learning about Alfred the Great following a short dramatic video clip of invading Vikings, and made good use of the wide range of resources available in their research. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about meeting 'Thorgil the Viking' during an earlier visit from a drama group. Teachers make good use of practical work, such as fieldwork when investigating rivers, carrying out experiments in science or making bread.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and interact enthusiastically with their classes. Pupils are given good opportunities to discuss ideas with their 'talk partners'. They learn to speak confidently and articulately in class, usually using correct English.
- Homework, well linked to classwork, is provided regularly for pupils and helps to involve parents in their children's learning. Children complete homework diligently and say it is a good aid to their learning; for example, of times tables and spellings.
- Teachers check pupils' written work regularly and give the pupils detailed feedback on their performance. Good advice on how to improve or a further testing question is frequently included. Pupils understand the colour-coded marking system and respond promptly to the guidance. Pupils say this makes a big difference to their progress.
- Leaders ensure that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs receive effective support. Extra help is tailored to each individual's needs; for example, through one-to-one support. Teaching assistants are well deployed. They are well prepared to support identified pupils and to feed back to the class teacher on the progress made. A link governor provides the governing body with up-to-date information about the impact of this provision on pupils' progress.
- Questioning is frequently used effectively by teachers and teaching assistants. Pupils often have to explain how they arrived at answers; for example, in mathematics. However, this practice is not consistently strong and sometimes questions asked of pupils do not demand enough from them.
- Teachers assess pupils' progress well at the end of lessons to plan a range of tasks for the next learning activities. Pupils are often given a choice of tasks with differing levels of challenge. However, some pupils, particularly the most able, do not always choose the most appropriate task straightaway, so that a few pupils do not make as much progress as they could.
- Teachers often use reading texts to initiate writing tasks. On occasions, the texts chosen do not interest boys enough and so do not help to promote high standards in their subsequent writing.

The achievement of pupils is good

- The progress pupils make has improved over the last year. Work seen in books shows that pupils now make good and sustained progress in all subjects. They are reaching higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics than in recent years. Although starting in the early years with skills and abilities that are lower than those typical for their age, pupils leave in Year 6 with attainment in reading, writing and mathematics that is in line with national averages.
- School information about pupils' performance shows that the proportions of pupils making and exceeding expected progress are in line with the national averages for reading, writing and mathematics. However, boys do not attain as well in writing as girls.
- Pupils develop good skills in phonics (the sounds letters make). In 2014, a similar proportion of Year 1 pupils to the national average reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check. This represents good achievement in relation to pupils' starting points and was a notable improvement on the 2013 performance.
- The school promotes reading for pleasure well. Pupils eagerly take part in reading competitions such as 'Extreme Reading'; an activity designed by the school requiring regular reading and associated writing to explain texts. Pupils make good use of the school library and classroom book corners. Regular guided reading sessions expose pupils to a wide range of texts and improve their comprehension skills. Year 5 pupils are proud to read with younger pupils and they say that this helps them to improve their own reading.
- Disadvantaged pupils, some of whom also have special educational needs, are supported well through a recent and well-planned programme of activities focused on each pupil's individual needs. In 2014, there were too few disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 to meaningfully compare their attainment with others. Although the number of eligible pupils varies widely from year to year, the historically wide attainment gap is closing quickly. Disadvantaged pupils are now making rapid progress and quickly catching up with others in school and nationally.
- Through well-tailored extra help, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make similar progress to their classmates across the school.
- The few pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress. They have well-planned programmes of support, including, where appropriate, the use of a school-based interpreter.
- The most-able pupils' progress has improved this year. Work seen in books and the school's own performance information show that these pupils generally make the same good progress as their peers. Teachers usually plan challenging activities for them, including extension work. However, a few pupils do not make as much progress as they could because they sometimes spend too long on easier work rather than starting the activities planned to stretch them.

The early years provision is good

- Most children start school in the Nursery. Generally, they have skills and abilities that are below the levels typical for their age in all learning areas, particularly boys and particularly in communication and language. Children make good progress in all areas of learning as they move through the Nursery and Reception. By the time they complete the early years, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is similar to the national average, and children are well prepared to start Year 1.
- The early years is well led and managed. All necessary safeguarding precautions are securely in place. Daily routines are quickly established and children learn how to socialise and take turns. They respond promptly to instructions and become more self-reliant, learning to do things for themselves. Their

behaviour is good.

- Adults check on the progress children are making in each area of learning and maintain accurate records in children's 'learning journals'. Suitable activities are planned that build upon children's earlier learning. Children made good progress in developing their social and fine motor skills when creating cards using scissors, glue and glitter. They worked harmoniously in sharing materials and persevered well with the task.
- Staff in the early years have established good relationships with parents. Parents are encouraged to share information about their children's progress at home so that staff have a full picture of each child's development. Parents have the opportunity to stay with their children at the start of the day to understand the teaching their children enjoy and to help them settle in.
- Adults take every opportunity to converse with children, helping them to develop their confidence and their speaking and listening skills. They use questioning effectively to extend children's vocabulary and make them think harder. For example, children discussed the features of toys and were encouraged to use a range of descriptive words.
- Children benefit from good teaching in the early years. The learning environments, inside and outside, are well organised, with stimulating displays and a strong emphasis on numbers, letters and words. Phonics is taught well. Adults model letter sounds accurately and ensure that all children are able to make the correct sound and link them to the right letters. Repetition and associated hand actions reinforce learning well. Children enjoy the activities, listen well and join in enthusiastically.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	133263
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	442083

This inspection of the school 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	231
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Marshman
Headteacher	Richard Fordham
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2013
Telephone number	01438 311937
Email address	admin@roebuck.herts.sch.uk

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