

Fir Tree Junior School

Radnor Road, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, OX10 0NY

Inspection dates

14–15 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Achievement for all groups of pupils, particularly in writing and mathematics, is improving rapidly. Pupils currently in Year 6 are making better than expected progress and their work in reading, writing and mathematics is above average.
- The inspirational leadership of the headteacher has united the school in the drive for school improvement. This has brought about significant improvements since the last inspection.
- Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. Their behaviour is outstanding and they enthusiastically engage with the exciting learning opportunities offered daily through the school's outstanding curriculum.
- Attendance is high and pupils feel safe.
- Senior leaders and governors understand very well how the school is doing. They rigorously monitor the quality of teaching to ensure learning is reinforced. This is a strength of the school and ensures teaching is consistently good and often outstanding.
- The partnership between teachers and teaching assistants is effective. The support provided ensures all pupils, particularly those with special educational needs, grow in confidence and experience success in their learning.
- Parents and carers speak very highly of the school and its support for their children. They appreciate the efforts taken to engage them in their children's learning through curriculum evenings and the daily life of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Although attainment is improving rapidly for all groups of pupils, it is still not high enough.
- Marking is not consistently clear in showing pupils their next steps in learning.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited all classrooms and observed 16 lessons, six of which were joint observations with the headteacher. Inspectors also took learning walks around the school, separately, with selected groups of pupils.
- School assemblies on both days of the inspection were also observed.
- The inspectors visited the school’s breakfast club.
- Pupils’ work in books was scrutinised during lessons and by sampling books from Year 3 and Year 6, and a group of pupils from Year 3 were heard read.
- Opportunities were taken to gather pupils’ opinions about their school and their learning, in formal and informal settings.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the governors, middle leaders and a representative from the local authority. A telephone conversation was also arranged with a representative from the National Support Strategy Partnership.
- Opportunities were taken to engage with parents and carers at the end of the first day of the inspection, as they came to collect their children.
- School documentation, including external reviews from the local authority, reports to governors and parents and carers, individual educational plans for pupils with special educational needs, tracking data, questionnaires and monitoring data, was scrutinised.
- Questionnaires from school staff were collected and analysed and the views of 75 parents and carers on Parent View, together with written letters and responses from parents and carers, were taken into account.

Inspection team

Marianne Phillips, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Matthew Klimcke

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Fir Tree Junior is a slightly smaller than average size primary school, where the majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds has increased over the past year and the number of pupils whose first language is not English has doubled.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is above average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above average.
- The number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for additional funding through the pupil premium is below average.
- 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?

- Develop the quality of teaching, ensuring the marking of pupils' work is consistently effective, by:
 - clarifying next steps for pupils in their work to ensure learning progresses
 - providing time for pupils to respond to the guidance given to complement the effective target setting strategies that are already in place.
- Ensure the drive for improvement is sustained by:
 - continuing to raise attainment so that this meets national expectations
 - maintaining the high percentage of outstanding teaching observed and endeavouring to increase the percentage of outstanding teaching.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' achievement is consistently good. Pupils in all year groups, whatever their background and including those for whom English is an additional language, make rapid and accelerated progress in literacy and numeracy. By the end of Year 6, pupils' attainment is slightly above the national average. There are indications that attainment over time could still have been higher and the school is actively working to improve this.
- Considering more-able pupils in 2011 their performance in English and mathematics was above, and writing was significantly above, the national average. Current data show that Year 6 pupils are exceeding targets set for them and are on line to achieve better than expected levels by the end of 2013. Year 5 pupils' achievement and accelerated rate of progress are indicating that these levels will be sustained by July 2014.
- Since the previous inspection in 2011, opportunities for sustained writing in English and the use of mathematical skills across the curriculum have been a focus for improvement across all year groups. The impact of actions taken has been very successful for all pupils.
- Additional funding for pupils has been used very effectively to focus upon building pupils' skills in phonics, reading, writing and spelling. This means that pupils benefiting from pupil premium funding make progress that is as good as others' in the school in both English and mathematics. Any gaps between the performance of those eligible for free school meals and their classmates are narrowing as the result of good support. This is evident in a comparison of average point scores at the end of Year 6.
- Pupils, particularly those with special educational needs and those in receipt of additional support through pupil premium funding, display confidence and enthusiasm in these aspects of their daily schoolwork.
- All pupils read widely and often. Parents and carers are very positive about the school and the way it supports their children. The learning of all groups of pupils is showing rapid and accelerated progress. Pupils who have special educational needs are very well supported by the school and consequently make similar progress to their peers. Support staff work effectively in partnership with teachers to increase the level of support for all pupils, particularly those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable.
- Pupils are very positive about their school sharing how much they enjoy all aspects of school life. Their examples of what makes their school special are extensive. However, many agreed 'we do very good work and we are proud of it'.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good. Teachers plan very effectively to ensure learning outcomes for all groups of pupils are at least good. The headteacher and other school leaders rigorously monitor the quality of teaching and learning, driving the improvement in teaching across the school.
- School-wide strategies, such as 'steps to success' and individual learning targets for all pupils, build consistency and quality in lessons. The quality of teachers' marking varies. Teachers are not always clear about the way they guide their pupils' next steps in learning and do not always encourage pupils to respond to the guidance provided through their comments.
- Teaching has improved steadily over the past two years. The headteacher has facilitated training to build teachers' expertise and skill and the learning culture of the school encourages teachers to share good practice. The way teachers use questioning to guide learning is a strength and they use it to assess pupils' understanding and adapt their teaching to ensure all groups of pupils understand and progress.
- The partnership between teachers and teaching assistants is good. This ensures that teaching assistants effectively support the learning of all pupils, but particularly those with special

educational needs.

- Pupil premium funding is used very well to provide adult support and resources that target learning needs. As a result pupils make rapid and accelerated progress in their learning.
- Teachers use interactive whiteboards consistently well to enhance the quality of learning experiences in all classrooms and to engage all pupils effectively. This is one of the many ways they make learning visual, interactive and fun.
- The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding because of high-quality provision and support. Assemblies are particularly effective in providing planned learning opportunities for pupils to celebrate through music and song, perform and lead, learn about culture and diversity, reflect and grow spiritually and to develop as caring young citizens. A cake sale and a red code of dress were enthusiastically supported to raise awareness and funds for Comic Relief.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils are very articulate, confident and enthusiastic about their school, sharing their views spontaneously. They display very good manners toward each other and adults and are well prepared for the next stage in their education. They are very successfully encouraged to be responsible and to take initiative in developing as independent learners in their lessons through the learning challenges they experience.
- They are proud to share their views through offering their 'tips to success' to their classmates. They have outstanding attitudes to learning and work well in partnership with the adults who teach them.
- Pupils say they feel safe and the vast majority say there is no bullying in their school. They are aware of a range of types of bullying including physical, emotional, cyber and homophobic. On the rare occasion when disagreements have occurred they say that teachers and adults in the school resolve the issues quickly. The school organises a friendship week, which raises the pupils' awareness of bullying and addresses the issues in a positive way.
- Relationships in school are excellent. Behaviour in all aspects of school life, including in the well-run breakfast club, is outstanding, whether in lessons, assemblies and structured settings or on the playground where pupils interact in social groupings of their own choice. Pupils feel that 'there are lots of people to be friends with in school'. They also appreciate things like the 'buddy benches' that 'help them meet friends when they feel lonely'. The school environment is very impressive in the variety of experiences it offers and the pupils feel it is one of the many things making their school special.
- Attendance is above the national average and punctuality is excellent. Praise, weekly celebration and the reward of having 'attendance Ted' to share their classroom are strategies the school employs to ensure attendance is sustained at a high level.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is a very effective leader, who is passionate about the way children learn. Her clear focus upon learning has been highly influential in raising the quality of teaching, introducing effective whole-school systems and structures to underpin school improvement and empowering staff to take on leadership roles. The training to build skill and adult expertise has been effective and staff appreciate the time and support given by the headteacher to enable them to fulfil their roles well.
- Performance management of staff is very effective. The systems in place rigorously challenge the quality of teaching, learning and attainment and ensure opportunities for continued professional development are embedded in practice.
- Safeguarding procedures are fully in place and the inclusive approaches ensure equal opportunity for all pupils regardless of faith, background or ability.

- The curriculum provides outstanding opportunities for pupils to be challenged and enriched by the experiences they share. It is broad and balanced and planning ensures good opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is also outstanding. The school very effectively ensures that there is no discrimination.
- There has been networking with other schools and with the support of external consultants, which has also been successful in raising skill levels of staff.
- The school has good capacity to improve. Since the appointment of the headteacher there has been significant improvement which is appreciated by all staff and which has had very positive impact upon the progress made by all groups of pupils.
- The local authority acknowledges the improvements that have been made by the school. Its support is light touch.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is very strong in its knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses in teaching and clear about areas to be improved. It understands well how the school is doing in comparison with all and similar schools.
 - Governors reflect deeply upon the ways they challenge and support the headteacher in the drive for school improvement, working hard to get the balance right.
 - The governing body is well structured to ensure its members are kept well informed and have the opportunity to actively monitor the quality of provision, particularly in relation to the use and impact of pupil premium funding.
 - It is rigorous in meeting its statutory responsibilities, especially through the objectives set for the headteacher's performance management; also in the way in which staff performance and the achievement of pupils are evaluated and related to their progress through the salary scales.

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	123071
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	406135
Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	175
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Glynis Wheatcroft
Headteacher	Nilofer Khan
Date of previous school inspection	21–22 June 2011
Telephone number	01491 836341
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