

Astmoor Primary School

Kingshead Close, Castlefields, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 2JE

Inspection dates

16–17 March 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is inconsistent. Teachers do not always expect enough of pupils and sometimes they do not move pupils' learning on soon enough.
- The most able pupils are not always challenged to deepen and extend their learning.
- The progress made by pupils from their starting points is uneven, particularly in writing. It is not yet strong enough to enable pupils to consistently reach the standards expected for their age or do better than this.
- Some pupils cannot read well enough to understand their mathematics workbooks.
- Disadvantaged pupils are not making the rapid progress they need to in order to catch up with other pupils nationally.
- Governors are not provided with sufficient information throughout the year to enable them to ask challenging questions about pupils' outcomes.
- Assessment of subjects, including history and geography, is not yet secure. Leadership of these subjects is underdeveloped, leading to variability in the quality of teaching.
- School plans do not focus sufficiently on all the areas that need the most development.
- Governors' plans to find out the views of pupils, parents and staff are at an early stage of development.
- Pupils do not currently have the opportunity to learn a modern foreign language.

The school has the following strengths

- Children get off to a good start in the early years because of good teaching.
- The school excels in its efforts to support vulnerable pupils and their families.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because their needs are met well.
- The teaching of reading and grammar, spelling and punctuation has improved.
- The school is a caring community. Pupils are happy and feel safe. They behave well.
- Leaders and governors are passionate about what they do and are committed to improving Astmoor Primary.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of the quality of teaching to increase pupils' progress and raise standards, particularly in writing, by ensuring that teachers:
 - have consistently high expectations of what pupils can do and achieve
 - set work at the right level of challenge, particularly for the most able pupils
 - move learning on quickly when pupils have grasped the concepts being taught
 - check that pupils understand the meaning of words they use in their written work
 - ensure that pupils are able to read and understand the text in their mathematics workbooks.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - checking closely that the spending of the pupil premium grant helps disadvantaged pupils to achieve as well as they can from their starting points, including the most able disadvantaged pupils
 - developing the role of subject leaders to ensure that they contribute more fully to improving the quality of teaching in subjects
 - further developing the school's assessment system to give leaders and teachers an accurate picture of pupil outcomes in subjects such as history and geography
 - ensuring that school plans reflect the need to bring about rapid improvements in the progress of disadvantaged pupils and leadership of subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Improve the effectiveness of governance by ensuring that governors:
 - use regular information about in-year pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics, to ask searching questions of school leaders in order to hold them to account robustly for pupil outcomes
 - have a clear picture of the progress made by pupils in subjects other than English and mathematics
 - ensure that pupils, especially those in key stage 2, have the opportunity to learn a modern foreign language
 - establish systems for finding out and responding to the views of pupils, parents and staff about the quality of education provided by the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement. Although there is evidence of improvements since the previous inspection, particularly in governance and the teaching of reading, grammar and spelling, the quality of teaching is not yet consistently good enough. As a result, progress is uneven across the school, particularly in writing and sometimes in mathematics. Standards are not as high as they could be, particularly for the most able pupils and disadvantaged pupils.
- All staff and governors share the headteacher's determination to continue to bring about improvements in the school's performance. Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has maintained a firm focus on improving the quality of teaching.
- Checks on the school's work overall are not sufficiently rigorous, because the role of middle leaders is underdeveloped. Leaders of English and mathematics provide clear guidance for their colleagues. However, too much leadership of other subjects currently rests on the headteacher's shoulders. Therefore, the regular challenge and support needed to ensure that all groups of pupils make good and better progress in all subjects is lacking, including in subjects such as history and geography.
- School plans identify the correct priorities to bring about improvements in writing and mathematics. However, plans do not specifically show that leadership of other subjects needs developing. Nor do they focus securely on the need to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils. This work is underway, but leaders have not set timescales or milestones to enable them to check on the progress towards these areas for improvement.
- Pupils helped design the school curriculum, which is based on a series of whole-school topics. The topics motivate pupils and capture their imagination. A range of trips and visitors support learning well. Currently, pupils are not given enough opportunities to study a modern foreign language.
- A wide range of well-attended after-school clubs are on offer to all pupils. Pupils say how much they enjoy taking part in 'speed stacking' and playing board games together. Table tennis has proved very popular and the school was recently successful in a competition with local schools in this sport.
- The primary sports funding is targeted at raising the quality of physical education teaching in school. Pupils' participation rates in sporting activities have increased and pupils enjoy opportunities to take part in various sports, including judo and karate.
- Leaders check the quality of teaching and learning regularly. They use this information to target professional development for individual staff. Staff report that they feel encouraged and supported to improve their teaching.
- Pupil premium funding is used in a variety of ways to support disadvantaged pupils. Pupils with emotional and social needs benefit from well-planned provision that supports their needs effectively. In addition, targeted small-group and individual work has had a positive impact on pupils' progress. However, leaders acknowledge that

there is more to be done to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils, to enable them to reach the same standards as other pupils elsewhere.

- The leadership of special educational needs is effective and additional funding is used well to help eligible pupils to achieve. The needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified as well. The views of parents and their children are listened to carefully to ensure that the provision is tailored carefully to pupils' needs.
- The leadership of teaching is now better focused on the progress that pupils need to make, including arrangements to manage staff performance. The headteacher has made clear her expectations of good-quality teaching.
- Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well supported through assemblies, class work and through the school's daily routines. As a result, pupils show well-developed levels of understanding of global issues, particularly those in the older classes. British values are promoted well.
- The local authority provides a range of support for the school, including for the development of the early years and the teaching of phonics.

Governance of the school

- The supportive governing body has acted on the recommendations of the external review undertaken following the previous inspection. Governors now have a clearer picture of their roles and responsibilities. Induction procedures for new governors are clear and are supported by regular training.
- Regular, focused visits provide governors with useful, first-hand views of the life of the school. School leaders provide the governing body with a range of performance information. However, governors do not yet hold leaders securely to account for the progress of pupils. The governing body does not have access to the in-year tracking data for all groups or know how well pupils are doing in subjects other than English and mathematics. As a result, governors' views of pupil outcomes are sometimes over-generous.
- Pupils enjoy the well-organised breakfast club and governors recently consulted with parents to see if this provision was meeting their families' needs. However, governors have not systematically found out the views of pupils, parents and staff. This has prevented them from acting on the views of these groups to make improvements in the life of the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff are knowledgeable about their roles and responsibilities in protecting children because they are well trained and receive regular updates from leaders. There are good systems in place to train staff who are new to the school. Pupils confirmed that they know there is always an adult willing to listen and help them if they are worried about anything.

- There is an effective system in place to check the qualifications of staff. Leaders make sure that adults working with children and visitors to the school are checked appropriately.
- Leaders ensure that systems to record behaviour and any bullying incidents are well organised. This allows leaders to check easily and follow up any concerns about incidents.
- Leaders take their role in supporting the pupils in care very seriously. They communicate regularly with the local authority's head of the virtual school and other relevant agencies. Leaders ensure that these pupils have every opportunity to take part in every part of school life.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent. Over time, teaching has not always been effective in ensuring pupils make good progress, particularly in writing. Teaching is strongest in the early years and in the older classes in key stage 2.
- Progress is uneven across the school. It is slower when too little is expected of pupils. This is when tasks are too easy and do not challenge the most able, in particular, and when too little work is demanded from pupils. Sometimes, too much time is spent on what pupils already know and can do, and learning does not move on quickly enough once pupils have shown they understand what is being taught.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers make clear what is to be learned and build on previous learning. They have high expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving, so no learning time is lost. Work is carefully matched to pupils' needs; it challenges all ability levels. Expectations are high; pupils rise to the challenge, try hard and produce a good quantity of work.
- Grammar, spelling and punctuation are taught systematically across the school. The school works hard to develop pupils' vocabulary, with much success. Pupils are thrilled when they use interesting or unusual words in their work. However, they do not always use these words appropriately and so their written work can lose sense.
- The school has introduced a new way of teaching mathematics which is starting to bring about improvements to progress, particularly in the older classes. However, at times, pupils in key stage 1 struggle to read what they have to do and this prevents them from getting on with their mathematics work and making the best progress possible.
- In most classes, teachers use questioning well to check on pupils' understanding. They use pupils' answers to address misconceptions and use pupils' errors to improve their work.
- Pupils are taught how to read systematically. In the early years and in key stage 1, teachers introduce the sounds progressively in daily reading lessons and pupils use these sounds to help them read unfamiliar words. Older classes use the same approach when tackling more complex spellings. Pupils enjoy reading. They read often in class and a good number read regularly at home. However, some pupils struggle to read the text in their mathematics workbooks.

- Class teachers and teaching assistants work closely together. Teaching assistants provide valuable care and support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who need some extra help to catch up with their work.
- Common features of all classrooms are the well-organised learning environments and the warm relationships that exist between adults and pupils. Pupils enjoy regular praise and encouragement and opportunities to share humour.
- Since the previous inspection, the impact of teachers' feedback to pupils has improved. Teachers' feedback follows the school's policy and enables pupils to tackle mistakes and improve their work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils feel safe. They are aware of the different types of bullying that they may encounter, including cyber bullying. They trust staff to deal with any incidents quickly. Pupils who act as safety officers lead assemblies and help their fellow pupils make safe choices both in school and in the community.
- Pupils new to the school are helped to settle well and report that they make new friends quickly.
- The school's support of pupils whose circumstance might make them vulnerable is of a high standard. Pupils are known as individuals and their social and emotional needs are met well. Strong links with external agencies exist and the school acts promptly to address any concerns if the need arises.
- Pupils are proud of their school and enjoy the many opportunities they have to be involved in the life of the school, for example as members of the school council.
- Many pupils, parents and staff said that they valued feeling part of the community of Astmoor. Many spoke about the end of year celebration known as 'Shine'. The school year ends with the opportunity for all to be involved in a week of sharing and recognising pupils' many talents.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils say they enjoy school and their learning.
- Pupils respond well to the high expectations of behaviour set by staff. Behaviour on the playground, in the dining hall and in the breakfast club is generally very good. Attitudes to learning are usually positive, although when learning lacks challenge, a few pupils' attention can drift. However, pupils respond promptly when adults recall their attention to their work.
- Overall, attendance levels are in line with the national average. A few pupils found it difficult to attend school regularly in 2016, though, and persistent absence rates were

high. Attendance has improved. This is due to the concerted efforts of pupils, parents and staff and the work of the school's family support worker.

- Pupils who sometimes find it difficult to manage their own behaviour are helped to do so firmly yet sensitively by staff. The higher-than-average fixed-term exclusion rates seen during the last academic year have reduced this year. The number of pupils missing school through exclusions is now much lower than in 2016.
- The small number of responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the views of the parents who spoke to inspectors are generally positive about the care and education provided for their children. The school website provides information about how parents can get in touch with the school, but their views are not currently sought regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Some cohorts are small. A high proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities and require additional support. This means that the published data does not always reflect a fully accurate picture of pupils' achievement. Nevertheless, pupil outcomes require improvement because progress is too variable across the school. Although progress in reading has improved year on year, particularly in key stage 2, too few pupils make consistently good progress in writing and, at times, in mathematics.
- Standards in reading at the end of key stage 2 have improved over recent years to be at least in line with the national average. However, standards in writing, and from time to time in mathematics, are not as strong and remain lower than those expected at the end of Year 6. In 2016, few pupils were working at greater depth in reading and none were working at greater depth in the other subjects.
- Over time, overall standards at the end of key stage 1 have been consistently below average. Published data in 2016 shows that the percentage of pupils in Year 2 reaching the standard expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics was again lower than the national average. Very few pupils are working at greater depth.
- Observations of pupils' learning, evidence from pupils' work and the school's own data about progress show some good progress in the early years and in the older classes in key stage 2. However, progress in key stage 1 and in the lower key stage 2 class is uneven. This is because the expectations of what pupils can achieve are not consistently high enough. The work set does not challenge pupils, including the most able, to do as well as they can. The school's data shows that less than half of the pupils in some year groups are working at the level the school expects for their age.
- The progress of the high proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attend the school varies across subjects at the end of key stage 2. Disadvantaged pupils make at least average progress in reading in key stage 2 and standards in reading are similar to the national average for pupils who are not disadvantaged. However, progress in writing and mathematics is more variable. It was below average at the end of Year 6 in 2016 and standards were lower than expected. Standards achieved by disadvantaged pupils at the end of key stage 1 are consistently below average in reading, writing and

mathematics. Few of the most able disadvantaged pupils are working at levels above those expected for their age.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their individual starting points because their needs are identified quickly. Good levels of support are put into place and checked regularly.
- The needs of pupils who join the school at other than the usual time are identified quickly and their progress can be rapid from their starting points in the school. Pupils who have been at the school for most of their education reach higher standards than those who join at other times.
- Pupils who are looked after, or who have been adopted from care, achieve well and make good progress from their starting points.
- The training provided by leaders to improve the teaching of phonics is proving to be effective. The number of pupils meeting the expected standard in Year 1 dipped to below the national average in 2016. However, school data and inspection evidence shows an improved picture, with more pupils reading at the level expected for their age in Years 1 and 2.

Early years provision

Good

- Children start the early years with skills, knowledge and understanding below the levels typical for their age. This is particularly true for children's communication and language skills and their social and emotional development.
- The combined work of the leader of the early years and the assistant headteacher provides effective leadership and management of the early years. An effective early years team is in place. All adults play their part in making sure that children are nurtured and safe. Staff make sure that the statutory requirements regarding children's welfare are met.
- Leaders identify children's needs swiftly when they join the school. They keep a close eye on children's progress and give extra support quickly to those whose progress may be slowing. For example, the school provides specialist speech and language support for children who experience difficulties in this area.
- Over time, as a result of good teaching, children have made increasingly good progress in Nursery and Reception. A significant dip in the proportion of children reaching a good level of development in 2015 has been overcome. In 2016, the proportion of children reaching the standard expected for their age was in line with the national average. Children are well prepared for Year 1.
- A good proportion of children in the current Reception class are likely to achieve a good level of development. However, leaders are aware that with greater challenge some children are capable of working at levels above those expected for their age.
- Children are safe and well behaved. They concentrate well on tasks for sustained periods. For example, during the inspection a group of children took great interest in finding out how many wooden blocks could cover the large robot drawn on the floor in the outdoor area. Each child carefully considered the shape and recorded their guess. Working as a team, and with a great deal of fun, children covered the robot

systematically and, helped by the member of staff, they counted the blocks carefully and checked whose guess was closest.

- Children respond well to adults' questions and instructions and are keen to learn, particularly when they work independently on activities they can choose for themselves. They select resources and equipment independently and use their imagination in creative activities.
- The early years curriculum provides a range of engaging activities which are adapted regularly to respond to the interests of children. Staff make good use of the indoor and outside resources and the curriculum is well planned to develop all aspects of learning well.
- Parents hold highly positive views about the welcoming atmosphere and approachable staff in the early years.

School details

Unique reference number	111217
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	10024098

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Lloyd
Headteacher	Louisa Aldridge
Telephone number	01928 565053
Website	www.astmoorprimaryschool.co.uk/
Email address	sec.astmoor@halton.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	10–11 March 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is smaller than most other primary schools. Pupil numbers in some year groups are low. Key stage 2 pupils are taught in three mixed-age classes. These are Year 3/4, Year 4/5 and Year 5/6 classes.
- Children attend the Nursery part-time and attend Reception full-time.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is very low.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is more than double the national average. No pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.

- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported through pupil premium funding is high and more than double the national average.
- The proportion of children looked after attending the school is much higher than average.
- The school population is becoming more stable. The proportion of pupils who join and leave the school at other than the usual time has fallen since the previous inspection, when it was high. It is now broadly average.
- Half of the members of the governing body are new to their roles since the previous inspection.
- The school participates in the Schools Direct programme for trainee teachers.
- The school is receiving support from a local teaching school.
- Governors provide a breakfast club for pupils who attend the school.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time. They observed learning in classes and when pupils learned in small groups.
- The inspectors looked at examples of pupils' work and talked to them about their work. They listened to pupils read and observed the teaching of reading skills. Inspectors talked to pupils about the books they have enjoyed and those that they are currently reading. Inspectors took note of displays around the school and the learning taking place outdoors.
- Inspectors talked with pupils informally at breaktimes, visited the dining hall at lunchtime and also observed the learning taking place at lunchtime. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour as they moved around school. They met with two groups of pupils.
- An inspector met with the chair of the governing body and six other governors.
- Inspectors met with a representative of the local authority and with members of school staff.
- Inspectors spoke to a number of parents at the start of the school day. They took account of 14 responses to Parent View.
- Inspectors examined a range of documents, including information about pupils' progress, school improvement and external views of the school. Inspectors reviewed the contents of the school's website and scrutinised records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding completed by school staff.

Inspection team

Lyn Pender, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Ofsted Inspector

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