

West Bank Primary School

Cholmondeley Street, Widnes, Cheshire, WA8 0EL

Inspection dates 21–22 October 2014

| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Inadequate | 4 |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|----------|
| | 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.

- In the early years children make good progress from their starting points.
- Teaching is good because teachers have high expectations. Activities interest and inspire pupils in a wide range of subjects and lead to good progress being made by all groups of pupils across the school.
- By the time pupils leave the school they reach standards that are above the national average, particularly in reading.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress and have closed the gap in standards to achieve at a similar level to their peers.
- Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding is well developed through a wide range of activities and visits.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They behave well and show care and respect for each other and adults. They have good attitudes to learning and maturely undertake responsibilities given to them.
- Governance is strong. The interim executive board has an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and is rigorous in holding leaders at all levels to account.
- The school is well led and managed by the headteacher. Together with other leaders, she has ensured rapid and sustained improvements to the quality of teaching and pupils' behaviour, safety and achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The proportion of pupils reaching the highest levels of attainment in writing is below that seen nationally.
- Although good teaching ensures that pupils make good progress from their starting points, it does not yet enable them to make rapid progress and secure outstanding achievement.
- Some middle leaders have not yet developed fully their leadership skills; consequently, not all ensure that their actions result in the best possible outcomes for pupils.
- The contribution that parents can make to pupils' learning is not yet sufficiently well harnessed to ensure pupils make outstanding progress, particularly in developing their writing.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 13 lessons, including those in which pupils were taught about how letters in words represent different sounds (phonics). Inspectors observed a class assembly which was attended by parents.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, members of staff, groups of pupils, two representatives of the interim executive board and a representative of the local authority.
- A range of documentation was examined, particularly that related to keeping pupils safe, and their behaviour and attendance.
- The school's tracking of pupils' progress was checked and pupils' work in books was examined.
- Inspectors took note of displays around the school.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read from all key stages.
- There were three responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), insufficient to allow any analysis. Inspectors took account of the school's two most recent questionnaires and spoke with parents arriving at the school at the start of the day and attending a class assembly.
- Inspectors took note of the analysis of the school's most recent staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

John Nixon, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Craig Richardson

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- West Bank is smaller than most primary schools.
- The school has an on-site breakfast club which is managed by the interim executive board.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils that are supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is well below the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is higher than the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and those children who are looked after or who have been adopted from care.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school has undergone a significant change of leadership and governance since the last inspection in May 2013. An interim executive board is in place and is overseeing the transition to academy status. A new headteacher and senior leadership team have been appointed.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so it is outstanding and raise pupils' achievement, particularly in writing by:
 - ensuring that teachers always plan work that challenges pupils and provides them with opportunities to reach the highest levels of attainment
 - ensuring that when teachers mark pupils' work, guidance on how to improve is always sharply focused and checks are made to ensure it is having the required impact on learning
 - ensuring that policies on how letter sounds are pronounced and letter names used are applied consistently
 - enhancing further parental involvement in their children's learning.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - developing further middle leaders' management skills so that they drive improvements in their subjects and across key stages
 - ensuring that all success criteria in the school's development plans are sharp enough to enable leaders at all levels to undertake more focused and incisive self-evaluation of the impact of their actions.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The school has significantly improved since the inspection that took place in May 2013. This is because of the determination and high expectations of the headteacher and interim executive board which are wholeheartedly shared by staff.
- Leaders have a good understanding of the quality of teaching because of their frequent and rigorous monitoring activities. Where teaching has fallen short of what is required, leaders have taken swift and decisive action to address it. Subsequently, inadequate teaching has been eradicated and the quality of teaching is now consistently good.
- Performance management is good. All staff, including teaching assistants, have targets that are challenging and linked directly to pupils' achievement. For teachers, these are enhanced further by links to the Teachers' Standards. There are clear links between performance management outcomes and teachers' pay progression.
- School development planning is closely linked to the school's accurate self-evaluation and results in appropriate objectives for future development being set. This includes the continued focus on improving the quality of teaching and raising attainment, particularly in writing. However, some success criteria are not sharp enough to identify what exactly is expected as a result of planned actions.
- Middle leadership has improved significantly. Subject leaders have enthusiasm for their subjects and strong subject knowledge. These qualities are used effectively to deliver improvements in their subjects and are reflected in the work seen in pupils' books. Subject leaders are regularly held to account by senior leaders and the interim executive board. However, some subject leaders are relatively new to their posts, and, alongside some other colleagues, need to enhance further their skills in the strategic leadership of their subjects across key stages and sharpen their skills in evaluating the impact of their actions.
- The school's curriculum is broad and enables pupils of all abilities and groups to participate in wide-ranging activities. Groups of pupils perform equally well, indicating that the school's promotion of equal opportunities is effective. Work seen around the school and in books demonstrates that subjects are taught to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding to a high level. For example, in some history books, pupils were able to demonstrate their good knowledge of Greek society and their ability to apply empathy to their writing through journalistic interviews with an imaginary Ancient Greek.
- Pupil premium funding is used well and is having a positive impact on improving the learning of disadvantaged pupils. The employment of a learning mentor means that some disadvantaged pupils attend more regularly while effective support in class is leading to improved standards and the closing of attainment gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils take responsibility for aspects of school life including the organisation of charity events for the local community. Some pupils play an important role in ensuring others always have a friend to play with at break times. Good use of links to other subjects ensures that pupils understand the importance of law and democracy while the study of other cultures prepares them well for life in modern Britain. Leaders have ensured that the primary physical education and sport funding is used effectively and has had a positive impact on both participation and pupils' well-being. Following consultation with pupils, a number of sports clubs have been provided, including climbing and gymnastics. These have been very successful in increasing the participation of pupils, with a number of them now undertaking gymnastics and climbing as hobbies in their own time. The school's entry into a local football league has also increased the participation of its pupils in sport. Additional training for staff has increased their confidence in teaching high-quality physical education lessons.
- The local authority and proposed academy sponsor know the school well. Both have provided significant support for the school since the inspection of May 2013. As a result of this support, the quality of teaching, behaviour and attendance has improved. Rightly, this support has now been greatly reduced because of the school's increased capacity to lead and sustain improvement.
- There were insufficient responses from parents to the Parent View questionnaire for inspectors to consider. However, a number of parents attending a class assembly, along with those who were delivering pupils to school, shared their views with inspectors. These discussions, alongside the outcomes from the school's own questionnaires, show that parents overwhelmingly support the school and recognise significant improvements have been made since the last inspection. Inspectors agree. Greater numbers of parents are now visiting school events, including the recent harvest festival. However, leaders recognise that there is still work to do to help parents to make the best contribution to their children's learning, particularly in the early years where initiatives introduced by leaders such as 'stay and play' are beginning to have a positive impact.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance of the school has improved and is good. The interim executive board has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, because of its rigorous and regular monitoring activities including the frequent checking of school performance data.
- Swift and decisive actions have secured effective leadership for the school and led to rapid and sustained improvements.
- The interim executive board manages the school's finances well and has brought about developments to the school's site which have improved pupils' safety and learning.
- The interim executive board is aware of how pupil premium funding is used to support disadvantaged pupils and regularly challenges leaders about its impact on learning. However, this review does not precisely identify which actions are having the best impact.
- The interim executive board ensures that the school meets its statutory requirements including those regarding the safeguarding of pupils.
- The interim executive board is effective in its management of the school's transition to academy status. This has ensured that leaders, teachers and other staff are able to concentrate on school development. Consequently, there have been rapid improvements to the quality of teaching and achievement in the school.
- The interim executive board's awareness and good understanding of performance management processes, including the relationship to teachers' pay, enable it to take appropriate actions to reward good teaching and tackle underperformance.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors and staff and say they like coming to school. They are keen to share what they are doing and show pride in their school.
- Pupils behave well at break times and as they move around the school. This is because of the good relationships pupils have with teachers and adults and the high expectations placed upon them.
- Break time behaviour has been significantly improved since the previous inspection. This is because pupils in all key stages are now given more freedom to enjoy their time outside. Pupils are provided with stimulating and enjoyable activities in which they can choose to participate. Supervision is well organised and adults participate in games and model good behaviours. Over time, there have been a very small number of minor behaviour incidents at break times. Generally, these have been quickly resolved by staff.
- Bullying is extremely rare in school. This is because of the work done by leaders and teachers to educate pupils about it. Pupils are aware of the different types of bullying including homophobic bullying and racial slurs. Older pupils who spoke with inspectors were insistent that 'it does not happen at West Bank' because teachers will not tolerate it.
- Nearly all pupils demonstrate good learning behaviour and are eager to work because teaching is consistently good and activities are interesting. However, in a small number of lessons, a small minority of pupils become distracted when the tasks set for them are either too easy or too hard.
- The attendance of pupils, including those identified as persistently absent, continues to improve over time. It is now above average because of the robust actions taken by leaders, including the involvement of external agencies such as education welfare officers, parent support team members and the use of penalty notices.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Policies are well written and comprehensive, including the recognition of wide-ranging threats including those related to both the content and behaviours associated with some aspects of the internet. All staff are aware of their responsibilities and apply procedures thoroughly.
- Regular risk assessment by leaders and the interim executive board identify risks and take immediate action to mitigate them. For example, the installation of an electronic gate to the playground has improved the control of access to the school. This results in a safe and secure environment which supports pupils' confidence and positive behaviours for learning.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when they use the internet, because of the effective teaching in lessons and at other times. Visitors such as local police officers help to complement the

teaching and give additional support at times of heightened risk, such as was seen during the inspection where a local police officer was delivering some training on water and firework safety ahead of the half term break.

- The school is an active participant of 'Operation Encompass', a multi-agency community-wide project that supports families that may experience domestic violence. Consequently, pupils say they feel safe and that they trust teachers and other adults to help them if they have a problem.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The quality of teaching has improved greatly and is now consistently good across the school. Teachers ensure that lessons start promptly and provide good learning experiences. As a result, pupils make good progress. This matches the school leaders' evaluation of teaching over time.
- Learning is good because teachers provide a wide and rich curriculum and use links between subjects to help pupils understand concepts effectively. In one class pupils were given the opportunity to bake and record their steps so as to write instructions in the form of a recipe. In another lesson pupils were able to explore their senses through smelling, handling and tasting a variety of different foodstuffs. Visits to the local community venues such as a local supermarket and outdoor adventure centre are used effectively to complement and enhance learning opportunities for pupils and the subsequent use of these experiences in class work leads to good progress.
- Pupils deepen their knowledge of subjects because teachers and other adults use probing questions to draw out their understanding, often by asking them to explain the reasons for their answers. Furthermore, pupils are not afraid to take risks. Because teachers have established a nurturing ethos in their classes, pupils respect each other's contributions and are not afraid to make mistakes. Consequently, all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs or disabilities, make good progress.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have good subject knowledge and use this to good effect to develop pupils' understanding. Where teachers are unsure of certain aspects of subjects they have increasingly turned to subject leaders in school to improve their understanding. This has resulted in subjects such as religious education and computing being taught more effectively across the school.
- Marking is of good quality. Feedback is regular and accurate in nearly all books and nearly always identifies how pupils can improve their work. However, in a minority of books, teachers' feedback and guidance is too general and not focused enough to have best impact on improving pupils' understanding. In a small number of cases, teachers do not ensure their advice is acted upon.
- Reading, writing and mathematics are taught effectively, particularly in Key Stage 2, where pupils make good progress from low starting points to reach standards expected for their age. However, pupils are not always given further opportunities to develop their more advanced writing skills so as to be able to attain the higher levels in end-of-key stage assessments.
- The teaching of phonics has been strengthened. As a result, there has been a rapid improvement in standards of spelling and reading. However, a small minority of pupils sometimes confuse letter sounds with letter names when reading or trying to spell. This sometimes hinders their progress in writing. Mistakes sometimes occur because leaders do not ensure that agreed policies regarding letter sounds and letter names are applied consistently to ensure all pupils make the best possible progress.
- Handwriting and presentation are improving strongly, particularly in English and mathematics because teachers regularly teach and model the new handwriting scheme well while checking rigorously that pupils apply it in their own work.
- Teaching assistants' effective support results in pupils, including those who have special educational needs or disabilities or those who are disadvantaged, making good progress and closing the attainment gap with their peers. Additionally, teaching assistants' work with most able pupils accelerates their progress and leads to higher levels of attainment, particularly in reading and mathematics. Their efforts have not yet increased the proportion of pupils reaching higher levels of attainment in writing.
- Homework is used effectively to support learning and activities are linked closely to the work done in class. Homework is regularly set and marked and teachers use it well to help them assess pupils' understanding of what has been taught. Pupils in Year 6 stated that the weekly overview of what they need to improve is of great help to them and inspectors agree.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Children in the early years make good progress from their starting points and are ready to start Year 1 by the time they leave Reception.

- In the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2013, pupils achieved levels above those seen nationally. The performance of girls was better than that of boys. In 2014, further improvements were made. All pupils in Year 2 who were re-tested were successful in achieving the required standard.
- Achievement in Key Stage 1 is good, even though published data show attainment to be below that seen nationally. This is because accurate pupil assessment data and work seen in pupils' books show that all pupils, including those with special educational needs or disabilities, are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics from their starting points. This good progress is the result of good quality teaching and greater scrutiny by leaders.
- In Key Stage 2, the progress of all pupils, including that of the small minority identified as being most able, is improving strongly. This is particularly the case in reading and mathematics because of the good quality of teaching they receive.
- By the time pupils leave Year 6, they are well equipped for their next phase of education. Overall, attainment in mathematics, reading and writing in 2013 was in line with that seen nationally while in 2014 it improved further to be above the national picture. Attainment is particularly strong in reading where, in 2014, pupils were two terms ahead of their peers nationally in 2013. However, while the proportions of pupils who attain the highest levels in mathematics and reading are in line with national averages, few pupils reach the highest levels of attainment in writing. School leaders are aware of this and are taking appropriate actions to address it.
- The proportions of pupils making expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics are above those seen nationally. So too, is the proportion of pupils making better than expected progress in reading and mathematics. In writing, the proportion of pupils making better than expected progress is in line with the national picture in 2013.
- Boys perform less well than girls in reading and writing but better in mathematics, mirroring what is seen nationally. Disadvantaged pupils have closed the gap in attainment in mathematics and reading to perform in line with their peers in school and other pupils nationally while in writing they are performing similarly to their peers in school and are approximately one term behind other pupils nationally.
- The small minority of pupils identified as being most able perform well as borne out by both national assessment data and school based data. All the most able pupils made expected progress in end-of-key stage assessments in 2014 and similar proportions to that seen nationally made better than expected progress. Work in pupils' books confirms that the most able in other year groups make good progress over time.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress because of well-focused support programmes and the good quality of targeted support from teaching assistants and class teachers.

The early years provision is good

- The early years is good because of the good quality leadership and teaching. It gives children a good start to their education so that they are ready to start Year 1. It is not yet outstanding because, although activities are interesting and challenging to all groups of children, they are not always coordinated in such a way to build upon the skills developed in individual activities.
- Most children enter the early years with skills and knowledge below those typical for their age. Children's skills in communication, language and literacy and those associated with mathematical understanding are particularly low. Despite this, by the time children move into Year 1, they have made good progress. Nearly two thirds of children achieve a good level of development with nearly all of them reaching the early learning goals in reading and mathematics. The proportion of pupils achieving expected levels of development in writing, although below that of other aspects, is now above that seen nationally.
- Children are eager learners who are keen to involve visitors in their activities. These activities are varied and often exciting, covering the seven areas of learning and leading to good progress being made. For example, one group of children was absorbed in developing imagination and dexterity through the creation of model vehicles. Good use is made of outdoor facilities to engage the children with their learning.
- Effective and accurate assessments and detailed record keeping by leaders and teachers enable them to plan appropriate activities that result in children receiving the support they need from both school and outside agencies.
- Good relationships have been established with parents, who are well-informed about their children's progress and development. Increasing numbers of parents are now choosing to attend 'stay and play' sessions that have a positive impact on children's progress and parents' skills to help their children

develop at home.

- Safeguarding and child protection policies are applied with the same rigour that is seen in the rest of the school. In particular, simple but effective use of internal gates that separate the early years from the other parts of the school mitigate the risks to children presented by the multiple staircases and different floors of the school's sites. This results in children feeling safe in the early years unit while having freedom to explore the learning opportunities it presents.
- Behaviour is good in the early years; children engage well with adults and are developing good manners and respect for adults and each other. They are eager to learn and collaborate well in activities supporting each other's learning and resulting in good progress.

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

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|--------------------------------|--------|
| Unique reference number | 111186 |
| Local authority | Halton |
| Inspection number | 450494 |

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

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|--|------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 151 |
| Appropriate authority | Interim executive board |
| Chair | Harry Ziman |
| Headteacher | Karen Highcock |
| Date of previous school inspection | 14 May 2013 |
| Telephone number | 0151 424 2799 |
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