

Stonehill School

Western Close, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire SG6 4SZ

Inspection dates

20–21 February 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher is a very effective leader. She has established a successful team and together they have brought about rapid improvements. As a result, the quality of teaching is now good.
- The governing body is a strength of the school. Governors are skilled in supporting the school's leaders. They hold them to account diligently for how well pupils are doing.
- Leaders at all levels are ambitious for the pupils at the school. They demonstrate relentless determination and high expectations. Consequently, the school has made significant improvement since the previous inspection.
- Pupils make good progress throughout the school. From starting points below what is typical, by the time pupils reach Year 6, their attainment compares well with that of other pupils nationally.
- Pupils behave well. They understand the rules and follow them in classrooms and on the playground. Pupils enjoy school and show good attitudes to their learning.
- Teachers are effective in their roles. They ensure that lessons are typically interesting, well organised, calm and purposeful. Pupils enjoy lessons and approach learning with enthusiasm.
- Parents, carers and staff are rightly positive about the school. They correctly recognise that the school is well led and managed.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are promoted very effectively. There is a strong sense of community in the school. Pupils contribute to the positive atmosphere by looking out for each other and acting responsibly.
- The early years classes provide children with a good start to their education. Staff focus well on helping children to develop good communication and language skills in readiness for Year 1.
- A small amount of weaker teaching remains in key stage 1. As a result, some pupils make slower progress than they should.
- Leaders are rightly focused on developing pupils' writing skills. Currently, pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to write at length throughout the school.
- Some of the most able pupils are not achieving as much as they could. As a result, a smaller proportion of pupils than nationally are attaining greater depth in writing.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching in key stage 1 by ensuring that teachers meet the full range of pupils' needs, so that more pupils make good progress.
- Improve the quality of pupils' writing, so that they make more rapid progress, by:
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to write at length and for sustained periods so that they develop better stamina
 - ensuring that pupils have opportunities to practise writing skills that are consistent with them attaining at greater depth.
- Increase the proportion of the most able pupils who achieve the higher standard, by ensuring that all teachers have appropriately high expectations of what the most able pupils are capable of, so that they provide them with sufficient challenge.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has high expectations of herself, staff and pupils. She is ambitious for the school and, since the previous inspection, has been relentless in her desire to improve standards. The headteacher has successfully established a culture of collective responsibility among leaders and teachers. As a result, this is a good school with good outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders have high aspirations for pupils. Systematic monitoring of the quality of teaching ensures that leaders have an accurate view of teachers' strengths and development needs. Leaders use monitoring to plan effective training, which has contributed to the improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The special educational needs (SEN) coordinator has an effective grasp of the issues that affect the learning of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. The strategies she has put in place enable pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities to access the curriculum and take a full part in classroom learning. Leaders ensure that these pupils make good progress over time from their relative starting points.
- The leaders for English and mathematics are highly motivated and ambitious for pupils. They have quickly identified improvement priorities and taken swift action to improve the quality of teaching. As a result, pupils now have outcomes that are similar to those of other pupils nationally.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. It captures pupils' interest and provides them with new and exciting experiences. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 recently met some snakes as part of a visit from an animal experience company. This provided them with exciting and stimulating writing opportunities. Provision for art is strong. Pupils produce art of a high quality that they are proud to show to their parents and carers.
- Effective use of pupil premium funding ensures that disadvantaged pupils are supported well, enabling them to make good progress from their different starting points. Targeted lessons are used well to support disadvantaged pupils, and their work shows that they make progress in line with that of other pupils nationally.
- Leaders ensure that the physical education and sport premium is spent well. Participation in sports clubs has increased, so that now the majority of pupils at the school, including disadvantaged pupils, participate. This is because a wide range of clubs, including those for dance and taekwondo, is available, which capture pupils' interest and are available to pupils of every age group.
- Leaders ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Pupils understand and learn about the value of people's differences, including other faiths, beliefs and abilities. Pupils are determined to improve their own school and community. The school council has recently purchased and decorated a friendship bench, which will be in the playground for children who have no one to play with. The school council says this is because 'nobody should feel lonely'. The money raised by the daily tuck shop is used to sponsor a guide dog.

- The vast majority of parents and carers were positive about the school. They agreed that the school is well led and managed and that their children make good progress. Many parents commented positively about the school. For example, one parent said, 'My daughter has flourished at Stonehill. Her teachers are highly skilled and have nurtured her learning and development.' On Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, almost all parents said that they would recommend Stonehill to others.
- Leaders have made good use of the wide range of support available from the local authority. An example is the provision of an adviser for English, who supported the leader of English to improve the teaching of reading. As a result, the pupils enjoy reading and have similar attainment to that of other pupils nationally.

Governance of the school

- Governors bring a range of professional skills, knowledge and experience that they use effectively in their roles. Governors have an accurate view of the school's strengths and development needs. They know how well pupils are doing and the school's current priorities.
- Governors are knowledgeable and skilful. They have been central to improvements, providing effective support and challenge to leaders. As a result, they have provided the strategic leadership that has enabled leaders to make the necessary decisions to bring about improvement since the previous inspection.
- Governors check regularly and thoroughly that pupil premium funding is being spent effectively. They know how the money is spent and challenge leaders on the impact it is having. As a result, the pupil premium funding is effective in improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders ensure that all the required pre-employment checks are carried out on those appointed to work at the school. This ensures that the school's single central record meets statutory requirements.
- The designated safeguarding lead has a good knowledge of her role. She has put in place good systems to ensure that all staff know how and when to raise concerns about pupils. Leaders work effectively with other agencies to protect children. They are rigorous in following up concerns when necessary.
- Leaders have fostered an open, caring culture at the school. Pupils correctly believe school staff will take action to support them, should the need arise. Pupils are safe, know how to keep themselves safe and rightly believe that they are safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has significantly improved since the previous inspection. Pupils achieve well because they find learning fun and like to challenge themselves. In mathematics, a Year 6 girl said, 'I went for that one first because it looked really hard.'

- Teachers have strong subject knowledge. This enables them to ask challenging questions that focus pupils' thinking and deepen their understanding. Pupils are encouraged to justify their answers and articulate their thinking. Pupils are then given useful opportunities to apply this 'thinking out loud' in their written work.
- Teachers use ongoing assessment in their lessons effectively. They are quick to intervene and correct pupils' misconceptions.
- Teachers have high expectations of the quality of pupils' work. As a result, in most classes, pupils demonstrate a commitment to improving their work.
- Teachers have well-established classroom routines and they enjoy excellent relationships with pupils. This helps them to make the most of learning time and keep lessons purposeful, calm and effective.
- The teaching of phonics is effective. For example, in Year 2, pupils are able to apply their prior knowledge to create sentences, spelling unfamiliar words correctly. As a result, pupils use their phonics knowledge when reading and writing.
- Pupils really enjoy reading. Pupils read widely and often because teachers have made reading fun and have placed a high importance on it.
- Pupils make good progress in English. The books demonstrate that pupils have well-developed spelling and grammatical skills.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics because lessons are challenging and build on what pupils can already do. Pupils' mathematics books show that work is matched well to pupils' abilities. Pupils are given good opportunities to practise their reasoning skills.
- Teachers use additional adults well to support the learning of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. They support these pupils in taking a full part in lessons and encourage them to be independent and not to become overly reliant on adult support.
- A small amount of weaker teaching remains in key stage 1. Where this is the case, pupils do not make the same good progress as in the rest of the school. For example, where teaching is weaker, teachers do not meet all pupils' needs. As a result, low-level disruption results in a few pupils not taking a full part in lessons, limiting the progress they make.
- Teachers do not intervene as quickly as they could to enable the most able pupils to make rapid progress. As a result, smaller proportions of pupils attain the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics compared with the national averages.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Leaders, staff and governors show a very strong commitment to the welfare of all pupils, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Staff know the pupils very well

and are therefore able to provide personalised guidance and support that are highly effective in meeting the needs of individual pupils.

- Pupils exhibit excellent perseverance and concentration skills. As a result, they demonstrate a commitment to improving their work.
- Pupils enjoy school and, when working in the classroom, remain focused on their learning tasks. One pupil said, 'This is a great school for learning.'
- Pupils welcome opportunities to widen their horizons about the world around them, for example by arranging a coffee morning for members of the local community who live in sheltered housing. They flourish as a result of a wide range of opportunities to contribute to, and participate in, local events. This builds their confidence and helps them to become effective citizens.
- Pupils know about bullying and the different forms that it can take. They say that there is no bullying at the school, but when pupils do behave poorly, it is quickly resolved by staff. For example, when reading about a bully stealing dinner money, a Year 6 boy said, 'It is the sort of thing that happens at other schools but not at our school.' Parents rightly agreed that the school deals effectively with bullying.
- Pupils said that they feel safe at school. Pupils know how to stay safe online. They are aware of cyber bullying and are confident to report any issues they encounter while online.
- Pupils have excellent attitudes to others. Staff care very deeply about pupils, while not compromising their high expectations. Pupils recognise their school as a place where people are kind. As a result, pupils understand that there are differences between people but say, 'It doesn't matter if people are different, you don't treat them any differently. Treat others as you would like to be treated.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave in a calm and orderly manner around the school. They are polite and courteous when talking to their teachers, each other and visitors. They play and learn cooperatively both in the classroom and on the playground.
- Pupils typically behave well in lessons. They listen respectfully to their teachers and classmates and respond quickly to teachers' instructions. As a result, learning in most classrooms takes place in a calm, productive atmosphere.
- Staff rightly agreed that the behaviour of pupils is good and well managed. Parents are positive about the behaviour of pupils and agreed that the school ensures that the pupils at the school behave well.
- Pupils' attendance and the levels of persistent absence are improving because leaders have put effective systems in place. As a result, pupils' absence rates are now similar to the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils are making good progress over time at the school. This enables pupils to close the gap, from entry points below what is typical, to attainment at the end of key stage 2 that is broadly in line with the national average.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress from their individual starting points. The SEN coordinator ensures that their progress is tracked well and that they are included fully in all classroom learning activities. As a result, their needs are being met and they are achieving well.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their starting points. Staff have a good understanding of the needs of these pupils and ensure that they are provided with the support that they need to play a full role in the life of the school.
- Pupils read fluently. The strong emphasis leaders place on reading in school and at home, and on reading for pleasure and high-quality texts ensures that current pupils are achieving well. Pupils say that reading is their favourite subject.
- Pupils make good progress in phonics in key stage 1 because phonics is taught well. In 2017, by the end of Year 1, pupils' results in the phonics screening check were the same as the national average.
- The work in pupils' exercise books is of a good quality. Pupils show pride in their work across the curriculum through taking care in the presentation of their learning.
- Historically, pupils have not made as much progress as they should in writing. Current pupils are making better progress, although they lack writing stamina. They produce the same amount of work regardless of ability. Therefore, pupils are unable to practise all of the necessary writing skills, for example, writing in paragraphs.

Early years provision

Good

- Children enter either Nursery or the Reception Year with skills and abilities that are below those typical for their age. Many children are most notably behind in their communication and language skills. Staff focus well on developing the speech and language skills of children, which helps prepare them for Year 1.
- Children make good progress during their time in Nursery and Reception Year. The proportion of children who achieved a good level of development was the same as the national average in 2017.
- The strong collaboration between Nursery and Reception Year staff is effective in developing good-quality provision for children. Staff interactions with children are effective. They support children to extend their play and thinking while developing their language skills.
- Reception Year staff have strong subject knowledge, which enables them to assess quickly the ability of different children. Teaching staff use highly effective questions that promote good progress in children's speech and language skills.
- The teaching of phonics in Reception Year is effective. Staff are able to use the interests of the children to further their knowledge of letter sounds, for example when making up words that rhyme.

- Children behave well in the early years classes. There is a calm and orderly environment because children understand adults' high expectations. Most children persevere with activities for extended periods of time.
- The learning environment is stimulating and exciting for children. Both the indoor and outdoor learning spaces provide opportunities for children to improve their skills in all areas of the curriculum. For example, outside, one girl was writing a list of the building materials and ticking them off as they were used.
- Children are looked after well in early years. The efficient safeguarding arrangements that are in place in the rest of the school are also present in early years. Children understand how to keep themselves safe, for example wearing safety goggles when hammering nails into wood.

School details

Unique reference number	117345
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10041763

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	245
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Millar
Headteacher	Elaine Close
Telephone number	01462 620262
Website	www.stonehill.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@stonehill.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	1–2 December 2015

Information about this school

- Stonehill Primary School is smaller than the average-sized primary school, with one form of entry.
- There is a before-school club that operates on the school site. This is managed by the school's governing body.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards. These are the minimum standards, set by the government, for pupils' progress and attainment.
- Approximately a quarter of pupils receive support for a special educational need, which is double the national average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs and/or an education, health and care plan is broadly in line with the national average.
- Most pupils are of White British origin. A lower than average proportion of pupils are believed to speak English as an additional language. Approximately a third of pupils have been eligible for free school meals at some point over the past six years.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching and learning over time. Inspectors observed parts of 22 lessons, some jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors looked closely at the work in pupils' exercise books. They listened to pupils read and talked to them about their work.
- Inspectors looked at a range of the school's documents, including assessment information. They checked the school's single central record of pre-employment checks and other documentation concerned with the safer recruitment of staff and volunteers.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, other leaders, governors, a representative from the local authority and a group of pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils throughout the inspection and with parents as they brought their children to school. Inspectors considered 31 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and 21 free-text comments.

Inspection team

John Crane, lead inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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