

River Bank Primary School

Bath Road, Luton, Bedfordshire LU3 1ES

Inspection dates

6–7 July 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	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- There have been significant changes to leadership and staffing, which have led to instability. Leaders have not secured consistently good teaching and, consequently, better pupils' outcomes.
- The quality of teaching is too variable. Teachers do not ensure that work is challenging enough and, as a result, most-able pupils do not make enough progress.
- Teachers' and leaders' use of pupils' assessment information has been too variable over time to secure good achievement.
- Progress pupils make is too varied across key stages and within year groups.
- Over time, and across a range of subjects, progress made by disadvantaged pupils has not been good enough from their starting points.
- Improvements in writing have been too slow. Too few pupils reach the expected standards in Year 2 and Year 3.
- Handwriting and presentation are not consistently good.
- The progress children, especially boys, make in their writing in the early years is slower than in other areas of learning.
- Overall attendance remains too low for all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. Some pupils do not attend school regularly and hence fall behind in their learning.
- Although the majority of parents are happy, the frequent changes in staffing have resulted in some concerns about how well the school is led and managed.

The school has the following strengths

- The new leadership team is moving the school in the right direction. As a result, teaching and outcomes are improving.
- Systems for safeguarding pupils are now rigorous and robust. The safeguarding and special educational needs teams provide good support to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils and the pupils achieve well.
- Governors have supported the school well through a period of challenge and change. They are committed to improving outcomes and have actively sought and acted on external advice.
- The school's values are evident in the ways pupils relate to each other and to adults.
- Pupils behave well and are keen to learn.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that it is consistently good by ensuring that:
 - pupils are challenged to achieve as well as they can, regardless of their starting points, including the most-able pupils
 - all assessment information is used effectively to set tasks that build on what pupils already know, understand and can do
 - pupils in Years 2 and 3 make accelerated progress so that more pupils reach the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Ensure that leaders and governors:
 - have a clear focus on monitoring how effectively individuals and groups of pupils learn and make progress
 - support and enable subject leaders to improve the quality of teaching in all subjects so that pupils make faster progress and achieve high standards
 - improve attendance and reduce persistent absence so that all pupils benefit from the education offered.
- Improve pupils' achievement in writing so that pupils make good or better progress by:
 - providing good, regular opportunities for pupils to write at length and for a wide range of reasons in order to practise and apply their writing skills
 - ensuring that there is a consistent approach to the teaching of handwriting
 - raising expectations of the presentation of pupils' work.
- Improve the quality of provision in the early years by:
 - ensuring that the outdoor provision is used to develop and extend early literacy and numeracy skills
 - providing good opportunities for boys to engage with writing and improve their writing skills.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Changes in leadership and teaching staff since the previous inspection have slowed the pace of improvement and the interim improvements noted in the monitoring visit by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) in January 2016 have not been sustained.
- Current school leaders have a realistic and accurate view of the school's areas for improvement. They are focusing on the correct actions to secure more rapid improvement. However, actions are in their infancy and these are not currently having enough impact on improving pupils' outcomes.
- The acting headteacher has had a positive impact in the short time that she has been leading the school. Pupils and staff alike say there are many aspects of the school's work that have improved recently, although they recognise that there is still more to be done.
- The system for managing teachers' performance is robust. However, the many changes in leadership and teaching have meant that the system has not been implemented consistently. Additionally, leaders have not closely monitored the progress that pupils make when evaluating the effectiveness of teaching. Therefore, teachers have not been sufficiently challenged. Teachers' expectations of pupils have not been high, particularly for the most able.
- There is now a programme of professional development for staff that focuses on the school improvement priorities and, as a result, the quality of teaching is improving. Newly qualified teachers are well supported to develop their teaching skills.
- Many middle leaders, including those for mathematics and science, are growing into their roles but, as yet, have made only a limited impact on raising standards for pupils.
- Leaders have correctly identified the needs of disadvantaged pupils and funding has been allocated appropriately. However, the strategies to support their progress have not been consistently implemented. This results in disadvantaged pupils across the school, in a range of subjects, not making good enough progress.
- The primary sport funding is used well as part of a bigger investment in promoting physical activity. Specialist coaches from Active Luton are used successfully throughout the school to improve teachers' coaching skills and pupils' physical development, as well as promoting greater participation in sport. More pupils now go to sports clubs and there are more opportunities for competitive events.
- The leadership of special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved and is now very effective. The additional special educational needs funding has been used efficiently. The team of staff is well led with roles and responsibilities being clearly defined. Staff have received training to identify and meet a variety of needs, and are effectively deployed throughout the school. As a result, pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- Leaders develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding through a topic-based approach to teaching the wider curriculum and the promotion of the 'Olympic' values. Pupils talk confidently about how the values help them in school and

at home, and they demonstrate an understanding of respect and tolerance in the way they relate to each other and to adults.

- Pupils enjoy access to specialist physical education and music teachers.
- A wide range of visits and visitors enhance the curriculum.
- Leaders have made improving attendance a top priority. A range of strategies are being developed to promote the link between good attendance and good academic outcomes. As a result, attendance overall is improving. However, while the number of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced, it is still too high.
- The majority of parents who spoke to the inspectors, or who responded to Ofsted's free-text survey and online questionnaire, Parent View, are supportive of the school. They welcome opportunities to be involved in the life of the school and support their children's learning. There were, however, a number of concerns raised about the frequent changes in both leadership and teaching staff, and how these are communicated to parents.
- Partnership working with a national leader of education from a local outstanding primary school, the local authority and an external consultant have supported the leadership of the school and provided effective support for teaching.

Governance

- Governors are diligent and committed to moving the school forward. They have:
 - been fully involved in overseeing performance management arrangements and recently taken effective steps to improve the leadership of the school
 - sought out and acted on external advice and deployed resources effectively to support school improvement
 - shared a good range of skills and expertise to support the leadership of the school and used these effectively to monitor and evaluate the school improvement plan and challenge leaders over the effectiveness of their actions
 - a good understanding of the use of additional funds given to the school and the impact of the actions taken to improve outcomes.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders, including governors, acted swiftly and decisively following the monitoring visit by HMI in September 2016, when safeguarding arrangements were judged ineffective, and have now established a strong safeguarding culture.
- Checks on adults employed by the school and school visitors are rigorous.
- Processes for reporting and recording concerns about pupils are well known by staff and followed consistently.
- All staff receive regular training on the school's systems to keep pupils safe.

- There is a comprehensive training programme for first aid and other medical needs, which is regularly updated as new pupils join the school.
- The safeguarding team, which includes governors, is knowledgeable and very committed. It follows up all concerns rigorously and works hard to ensure that pupils and their families get the right support. This support is accessible because the school has built effective links with outside agencies.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has not been good enough over time. Recent improvements have not had enough time to support better outcomes for pupils, particularly in Years 2 and 3.
- Although there is evidence of some effective teaching in every year group, teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. Progress for all pupils is too variable across all subjects, particularly in Years 2 and 3 and for disadvantaged pupils.
- A new approach to providing pupils with guidance on how to improve their work has been introduced. While there is evidence in pupils' workbooks of this approach being implemented, it is not yet being consistently applied and so its impact is not showing that it is rapidly improving pupils' outcomes.
- Assessment information is not used effectively enough to plan next steps in learning. Teaching is not matched closely enough to the needs of the pupils across different ranges of ability. Pupils sometimes lack opportunities to build on what they have learned over time, which means that progress is slower, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- Teachers do not check the learning and progress of the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, closely enough. As a result, these pupils do not make consistently strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics and do not reach the highest standards they should.
- Teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to improve their writing skills across a wide range of subjects. Until recently, there has not been enough challenge in the writing tasks and pupils do not develop fluency in writing. This is particularly the case for pupils in Years 2 and 3.
- There is not enough emphasis on having a consistent approach to the teaching of handwriting or an acceptable presentation of work.
- The teaching of mathematics now provides more opportunities for pupils to think about and solve problems and, consequently, to apply and deepen their understanding.
- The school's emphasis on reading for pleasure ensures that pupils enjoy reading. The increased focus the school has given to the teaching of phonics is resulting in improvements in the standards of reading. Pupils heard read during the inspection read fluently using a range of strategies. Parents are encouraged to share books and read with their children.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good and often better progress from their starting points. Their learning needs are clearly understood, their progress is closely tracked and effective interventions are in place.
- Additional adults are effectively deployed across the school and support pupils well in developing independent learning skills.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils feel safe and are safe in this inclusive welcoming community. Pupils know they are listened to. A good example was the recent audit by the health and safety governor with the school council, who walked the site and identified areas they felt needed improving. As a result, there is an increase in the number of adults at key points on the field and all wear high-visibility jackets.
- The systems for reporting and following up any bullying concerns are rigorous. There are very few incidents and all have detailed follow-up actions.
- Pupils who spoke to the inspectors had a very clear and mature understanding of how to stay safe on the internet and how to keep themselves safe in their homes and communities.
- Pupils are confident learners and speak enthusiastically about their school and the many opportunities it gives them. They are proud to be part of the River Bank community.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of how to stay fit and healthy. Building healthy lifestyles are at the heart of the school's ethos, and pupils and parents enjoy this approach. Many pupils and staff were observed walking the 'daily mile' track on the field.
- The school provides subsidised care before and after school to support pupils and their families, and this has promoted improved attendance and outcomes for the pupils.
- The social and emotional progress of pupils who attend the external specialist resource base is carefully tracked. Pupils who attend the base have a named adult who works in both provisions to ensure that staff use the approaches that support the pupils best. Pupils are developing increasing self-control and, as a result, they are more engaged in their learning and make good progress in their academic and social development.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because attendance is too low.
- Good attendance and punctuality have an increasingly high profile in the school. The more rigorous monitoring and following up of absence by the attendance and welfare teams are resulting in fewer pupils being persistently absent. However, the figure is not reducing at a fast enough rate and still remains much higher than the national average.

- Staff implement the behaviour policy consistently and pupils have a good understanding of how and why the choices they make have an impact on their learning. Pupils play together very well in the large and well-resourced playgrounds and field.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and are keen to do well and make progress.
- Pupils enjoy the many opportunities to be rewarded for both good work and behaviour and are very pleased for each other, as was evident in the Friday celebration assembly.
- Pupils are kind and considerate to each other and demonstrate that they understand and follow the school's values.
- Some parents expressed concerns about the behaviour of a small group of pupils. Inspectors confirmed that any incidents of poor behaviour are logged and followed up.
- Those pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour are well managed. Pupils' individual needs are met and therefore their behaviour does not interfere with their learning or with the learning of others.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- A combination of changes in staffing and leadership and a lack of consistency in teaching have meant that outcomes for pupils in terms of attainment and progress have not been consistently good.
- Many children start the early years with skills lower than those typical for their age. An increasing number are making good progress and reaching a good level of development but the boys do not achieve as well as the girls because their needs are not always correctly identified.
- Pupils who join Year 1 from the early years are increasingly well prepared for this next stage in their education. Pupils leaving Year 2 are less well prepared for key stage 2 because not enough of them are reaching the nationally expected standards, particularly in writing.
- The school's first Year 2 results in 2016 showed that while attainment was closer to the national average for mathematics and science, it was lower in reading and much lower in writing. Outcomes have improved in 2017, but standards in writing still remain too low.
- Recently, pupils in Year 2 have been making more rapid progress, particularly in writing. There is clear evidence of more writing at length and in depth.
- The quality of writing across the school is below that seen nationally. Too few of the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, reach the higher standards they are capable of reaching, because they have not always been challenged enough.
- Disadvantaged pupils have not made sufficient progress from their starting points over time across reading, writing and mathematics because planned interventions have not always taken place.

- A greater number of pupils are now reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1 and Year 2. This has led to improved outcomes in reading.
- The current rates of progress are too slow in Year 3. The gap between attainment and what pupils are expected to achieve by the end of Year 3 is not closing quickly enough.
- Pupils achieve well in sport, including competitive sport, as evidenced by their victory in the borough-wide athletics tournament.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points as a result of effective interventions and targeted support.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent in the early years. Changes in staffing and a lack of knowledge about what makes effective learning have resulted in slower progress for some children, particularly the most able.
- The school's assessment information shows that an increased proportion of children, including disadvantaged children, have achieved a good level of development this year.
- Planning for learning in the outside environment is not clearly linked to developing challenge in all areas of learning, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Not all adults have a secure understanding of what the next steps in learning are for individual pupils, and so do not extend their learning sufficiently well.
- Boys achieve less well than girls. Although activities are planned to capture children's interest, there are too few opportunities for boys to write and this slows the development and progress of their writing skills.
- Phonics lessons are effective in helping children learn to read. Children are making good use of the range of reading materials available and developing good reading habits.
- Children begin to write numerals accurately and to record simple number sentences as they learn to count, add and subtract. However, provision for developing mathematical understanding during outdoor activities is not as well developed as during the indoor activities.
- Children make good progress in developing their physical skills. Good use is made of specialist staff to develop children's coordination, control and movement.
- 'Learning journeys' record careful and regular assessments of the progress children are making across all areas of learning.
- Disadvantaged children make good progress from their starting points: their needs are correctly identified and actions to improve their outcomes are effective.
- Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress from their starting points. This is because their needs are clearly identified and good support is provided.
- Children are confident learners. They make good progress in developing their social and personal skills. They are increasingly well prepared for Year 1.

- Children are well cared for and happy at school. They work and play in a safe, secure environment. Leaders have ensured that all staff continue to be well trained in first aid and child protection procedures.
- Parents appreciate the opportunities they have to be involved with their children's learning. They welcome the regular feedback they receive about their child's progress and how they can support learning at home.

School details

Unique reference number	139782
Local authority	Luton
Inspection number	10031377

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	355
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Jon Williets
Headteacher	Judith Trainor (acting headteacher)
Telephone number	01582 531 860
Website	www.riverbankprimary.org
Email address	info@riverbankprimary.org
Date of previous inspection	7–8 July 2015

Information about this school

- River Bank Primary School opened in September 2013 and is sponsored by Active Luton which established the Active Education Trust through which it operates.
- Since the previous section 5 inspection, the school has had two section 8 inspections. In January 2016, a monitoring inspection judged senior leaders and the trust to be taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement. In September 2016, an inspection was carried out because of concerns for the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and aspects of leadership and management. The inspection judged that safeguarding was not effective.
- The school receives support from the local authority and a national leader of education.
- The substantive headteacher in post at the previous inspection left at Easter 2017. An acting headteacher, the new deputy headteacher, is leading the school for the summer term. A new substantive headteacher has been appointed for September 2017.

- This academic year there are four Reception and Year 1 classes, three classes in Year 2 and two classes in Year 3. The school will continue to grow over the next three years to reach its full capacity when it will eventually provide primary education through to Year 6. The numbers of classes in each year group may change in response to demand for school places.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is broadly in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are from minority ethnic heritages is well above the national average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language. The largest group is of Asian heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average.
- A few pupils currently attend an alternative form of education at an external specialist resource base.
- The school operates its own nurture unit.
- The early years provides full-time education for children in their first year at school.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish on their website.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors carried out a range of observations in all classes, often alongside senior leaders.
- Inspectors held discussions with senior and middle leaders, newly qualified staff, members of the governing body, the local authority school improvement partner and the national leader of education supporting the school.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of pupils' written work including that on display. They heard pupils read both in class and in settings that are more formal.
- Inspectors spoke to different groups of pupils about their work. They also spoke about their experiences of being pupils at River Bank.
- Inspectors observed behaviour at different times of the day. These included before and after school and at lunchtimes.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of written evidence, including safeguarding records, behaviour records, records of attendance and school improvement work. Records of the work of leaders in monitoring the quality of teaching, the school's records of pupils' progress, governing body records and plans for improvement were also looked at.
- Inspectors met informally with a number of parents at the beginning of the school day and a small group more formally. They took account of 27 responses to Parent View, alongside a range of written comments submitted by parents.
- Inspectors also took into account 28 responses to the staff questionnaire and 98 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Liz Chaplin, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jacqueline Treacy	Ofsted Inspector
Lesley Stevens	Ofsted 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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