

Alban Wood Primary School and Nursery

The Brow, Watford, Hertfordshire WD25 7NX

Inspection dates

2–3 March 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The inspirational headteacher demonstrates high aspirations and uncompromising ambition for pupils and staff. She is very ably supported by the deputy headteacher. Other leaders, staff and governors share their vision and drive.
- In their everyday actions, staff, governors and pupils demonstrate the school's values of respect, kindness and ambition.
- From starting points often below those typical for their age, pupils make outstanding progress throughout their time at Alban Wood.
- The proportion of pupils who reach at least the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6 is well above that found nationally.
- The proportion who go on to achieve a more advanced standard in these subjects is high: in 2016, at least twice the national average.
- Key to the school's success is the outstanding use made of accurate assessment information.
- All groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the most able pupils are very effectively supported to make strong progress from their starting points.
- Teachers know how to get the best from their pupils. They plan activities matched closely to each individual pupil, which are neither too hard nor too easy. As a result, learning is always purposeful.
- Highly trained teaching assistants offer very effective support to all pupils.
- Staff work in teams to monitor subjects. They share expertise and ideas. However, this can mean that no one has a complete picture of any individual subject area.
- The high-quality curriculum stimulates pupils to want to learn. Pupils receive many real and relevant opportunities to hone their basic skills in challenging activities in other subjects.
- Pupils thrive and feel safe. They know that if they have any worries they will be listened to.
- Leaders responded well to the previous inspection's recommendations. The early years outside areas are now stimulating places to learn. Some activities inside, however, do not promote children's learning as well.
- Parents are confident that pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Parents welcome timely communications through social media. Some aspects of the website are less easy for parents to access.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that middle leaders have all the information they need to secure high standards and accelerated progress in the subjects for which they are accountable.
- Ensure that all child-initiated activities in the early years fully support children's learning.
- Check that information on the school's website is accessible to parents.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher provides inspirational leadership for the school. She has created a culture where everyone strives for excellence. Complacency is unheard of. Her determination and relentless drive for improvement galvanises those around her. She is determined to see every pupil succeed. The deputy headteacher, other leaders, staff and governors share her vision and ambition. Staff responding to their survey overwhelmingly agreed that the school has improved since the last inspection.
- Leaders constantly seek to improve the school further. Their forensic analysis of the school's strengths and areas for improvement ensures that they know the changes needed. All staff and governors know the present priorities, and precisely how they are to be achieved. Staff responding to their survey unanimously agreed that they have a clear understanding of the goals the school is aiming to achieve.
- Leaders' regular and rigorous checks on the quality of teaching and learning lead to frequent, high-quality training. Staff morale is high because they know leaders will support and guide them. The headteacher recognises potential and draws out the best in staff. She is as ambitious for her staff as for pupils. Collectively, staff are a very effective team. Individually, strengths are used to great success.
- Middle leaders work in teams to monitor and develop a group of subjects. They benefit from sharing expertise, experience and ideas. However, this can mean that, individually, they do not have all the information they need to have maximum impact on the subject for which they are accountable.
- Teachers fully understand the excellent systems for tracking pupils' progress. They glean information about each pupil and ensure that any in danger of falling behind are quickly spotted. Pupils quickly catch up because extra help matches their need. As a result, pupils make consistently strong progress throughout their time at Alban Wood.
- The excellent curriculum fully meets the needs of pupils. Basic literacy and numeracy skills are practised in real and relevant activities linked to other subjects. Whether graphing climatic conditions, or writing a historical account in the style of a diary, they deepen their understanding. Visits and visitors enrich learning.
- Numerous high-quality extra-curricular opportunities, some suggested by pupils themselves, enable pupils to pursue their interests, refine skills they already have and develop new ones.
- Pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development defines them as a community. Everyone practises and 'lives' the school's core values of respect, kindness and ambition. British values are tightly interwoven in everything the school does. As a result, pupils develop as well-rounded, responsible citizens.
- The school's highly inclusive approach results in outstanding support and guidance for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The provision is managed extremely well. Efficient use of additional funds benefits pupils. Pupils' well-being and happiness are given the same emphasis as their academic development. Consequently, pupils thrive.

- Leaders' highly effective use of additional pupil premium funding ensures that disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most able, flourish. As a result, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is higher than that of other pupils nationally.
- The use of primary physical education and sport funding is equally effective. Pupils say they choose from a greater number, and wider range, of opportunities than in the past. The sports coach works with pupils and staff to enhance skills. Lunchtimes include energetic activities. Pupils compete in a range of sporting events. As a result, pupils' participation in sport is increased. They understand the importance of energetic activity to their health and general well-being.
- Pupils and staff benefit from good links with local schools. Pupils enjoy a range of activities, from competing at sports to problem solving with other able pupils. Staff are outward-looking, always seeking ways to learn from others and further improve the school's outstanding provision.
- The relationship with parents is very positive. Parents welcome the many ways they are involved in the school. The vast majority of parents would recommend the school to another parent. Typical comments include, 'A fantastic, superbly run school', and 'My children cannot wait to get to school. They love participating in any challenge the school sets them.' Parents praise the school's use of social media to communicate in 'real' time. However, some information on the website is presented poorly. For example, policies can be confusing because pages are not in the correct order.
- The local authority recognises the leadership skills of the headteacher and other members of staff. In their different roles, they offer support and guidance to other local schools.

Governance

- Governance is highly effective. Governors know the school very well. They epitomise the culture of support, challenge and shared ambition found throughout the school.
- Governors value the wealth of information given to them by school leaders. They confirm this by visiting the school regularly, so they see for themselves. 'Governors' Days', when they visit as a group to participate in a wide range of activities such as joining lessons and talking to pupils, help give them a shared understanding. As a result, governors clearly understand how leaders' actions have a positive impact on the school's priorities.
- Governors ensure that spending decisions are firmly rooted in the best interests of pupils. For example, the recent focus on reading has been supported by a significant investment in books and the new attractive outdoor reading room, which entices pupils to read.
- Governors keep a very close check on additional funding, including the pupil premium, to ensure that it is making a positive difference for pupils.
- Governors oversee the performance of staff, including the headteacher, closely.
- Governors ensure that all statutory responsibilities, including those relating to safeguarding, are met.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that training, such as in child protection and the 'Prevent' duty, is up to date. As a result, all staff have a very good awareness of what to look for in order to keep pupils safe.
- Staff said that they are confident in raising any concerns. The procedures for this are clear and followed rigorously by staff.
- The overwhelming majority of parents responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children feel safe in school.
- The school swiftly involves outside agencies should action be needed to address any concerns or seek help to support families in difficulty. This approach helps pupils and their families get access to the services they need, which helps to keep pupils safe.
- Checks on the suitability of staff, governors, volunteers and contractors are thorough. Documentation is comprehensive and detailed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Excellent relationships between staff and pupils ensure that lessons flow smoothly and learning is interrupted very rarely. Even in the very youngest class, children move quickly and quietly from one activity to another, eager for the next challenge.
- Pupils confidently ask questions and volunteer their thoughts because the ethos in every classroom is respectful and trusting. In their online survey, all pupils said they enjoy learning, and nearly everyone said that their teachers help them to do their best.
- Teachers and teaching assistants engender a love of learning. They present learning in different and imaginative ways to arouse pupils' curiosity. They say they are trusted by senior leaders to take risks and innovate in ways that are right for the pupils.
- Each teacher's subject knowledge and expertise are deployed very effectively. Pupils' learning benefits from specialist teaching. Leaders and governors are as ambitious for staff as for pupils. They encourage teachers to pursue and hone their skills. Staff agree that leaders do all they can to see the school has a motivated, respected and effective teaching staff.
- Teachers and teaching assistants know their pupils very well. They know how each individual pupil learns best, and tailor planning to meet their needs exceptionally well. As a result, teachers stretch pupils without overwhelming them.
- Pupils respond enthusiastically to each new challenge. All staff promote the culture of 'ambition' and foster a can-do attitude. Pupils' response is very much 'I can't do it *yet*', not 'I can't do it'.
- Skilled, well-trained and highly motivated teaching assistants make an excellent contribution to pupils' learning. Their role is pivotal. Whether teachers deploy them to go over a gap in learning, to correct a misconception, or to challenge the most able further, they contribute significantly to pupils' rapid progress.

- Teachers build pupils' reading skills exceptionally well. Phonics is taught effectively so pupils use this skill very accurately when they come across unknown words. Teachers use a wide range of challenging texts to widen pupils' vocabulary.
- Teachers provide pupils with meaningful opportunities for writing in other subjects. Pupils apply their grammar, punctuation and spelling skills in these lessons, too.
- The teaching of mathematics is outstanding. Pupils confidently juggle numbers and demonstrate high levels of numeracy. In many other subjects, they enjoy opportunities to work together to apply their mathematical knowledge and solve relevant problems.
- Homework is used effectively. Key skills are practised in some activities, while others give pupils a choice of more open-ended tasks to enable them to pursue their interests.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Almost every parent responding to Parent View agreed that their child is happy at the school. All pupils responding to their online survey said that they feel safe in school.
- Pupils develop as exceptionally well-rounded individuals because they thrive in the happy, calm and caring environment.
- Pupils' outstanding attitudes contribute greatly to their learning. They come to school keen and eager to learn, and throw themselves into the tasks they are given.
- Pupils welcome the numerous opportunities to take responsibility and play a meaningful part in school life. Whether as 'apprentice' or an 'expert', pupils learn to be responsible for the various small animals on the school's 'farm', come rain or shine!
- Staff actively promote and encourage pupils to have a voice in their school. When Year 4 wrote persuasively to the headteacher, asking to develop outdoor learning, she responded positively. Governors ask pupils for their opinions and consider them when planning for the future. In this very practical way, pupils see democracy in action.
- A genuine warmth exists between staff and pupils, and between pupils themselves. Pupils very willingly help one another. Older pupils particularly enjoy opportunities to help those younger than themselves. In assembly, they are quick to congratulate one another's achievements.
- Leaders promote pupils' emotional and social development particularly well. The nurture group promotes pupils' self-esteem and confidence. A significant aspect of the school farm is the therapeutic benefit of pupils being with and around animals.
- Each day gets off to a purposeful start. Pupils respond very positively to 'soft start', the opportunity to start school early. In the classes visited by inspectors, nearly all pupils were present and engaged in meaningful tasks.
- Positive relationships between pupils and staff, and the caring culture of the school, ensure that pupils know that they will be listened to should they have worries or concerns.

- Pupils say that they feel safe in school, and are confident that staff would respond quickly and effectively should any pupil be bullied. They understand that bullying can take different forms, and the need to keep themselves safe when using the internet. In every computer lesson, they receive regular safety reminders.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. A very high proportion of parents responding to their online survey agreed that the school makes sure its pupils are well behaved, and deals effectively with bullying.
- When they join the school, pupils quickly learn the school's strong values that promote good behaviour.
- Pupils' conduct around the school and in lessons is exceptional. Staff promote the school's values of respect and kindness. They lead by example.
- Pupils work and play together very harmoniously. Behaviour is impeccable. When working in a group, they willingly offer their own opinions, listen respectfully to others and contribute to finding a shared viewpoint.
- Pupils take great pride in themselves, their workbooks and their school. They treat equipment with great care and help keep their school tidy.
- Attendance is above average and punctuality good. Attendance is monitored closely and swift action taken to support families when needed. Parents welcome the high-quality before- and after-school care. It, too, supports attendance and punctuality.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- From starting points often below those typical for their age when they start school, pupils make outstanding progress in reading, writing and mathematics. They make substantial progress in a range of other subjects, too.
- Over the last few years, attainment at the end of Year 6 has been consistently above that found nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2016, it was well above.
- In 2016, the proportions of Year 6 pupils who went on to attain the more advanced 'higher standard' in reading and mathematics and 'greater depth' in writing were also well above the national average. In reading it was half as much again, in mathematics twice the national figure and in writing higher still.
- Attainment at the end of Year 2 shows a similar picture to Year 6, because progress is strong throughout the school. In 2016, attainment was well above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics, and the proportions of pupils working at greater depth were between two and three times the national figure.
- Pupils' work in their books and the school's information about progress show that pupils currently in the school continue to make outstanding progress. They are on track to sustain above-average standards by the end of Year 6.
- In the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2016, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard was similar to the national average. Current assessment information indicates that this year the proportion is likely to be higher.

- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make outstanding progress. Like other pupils, their needs are analysed and they receive the precise teaching they need to quickly learn the language.
- Disadvantaged pupils make outstanding progress. As a result, by the time they leave Alban Wood, their achievement in reading, writing and mathematics is above that of other pupils nationally. Disadvantaged pupils in all year groups make similar rapid progress. The difference between themselves and other pupils in the school is diminishing.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make rapid gains in learning from their different starting points. This is largely because the highly effective use of extra help in mathematics has been mirrored successfully in writing. As with all pupils in the school, fundamental to the school's success is the very precise and accurate assessment of what each pupil needs to learn next, and the provision of extra help very closely tailored to meet it.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- In 2016, the proportion of children who reached a good level of development by the end of Reception was well above the national average. This represented outstanding progress from their starting points. Current assessment information indicates that the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is likely to be of a similar standard by the end of this year.
- Children respond very positively to everything staff ask of them. Many of the school's approaches to teaching and learning start in the early years. For example, children learn about respect, kindness and ambition at an age-appropriate level.
- Children's attitudes to learning are outstanding. They invariably arrive early for 'soft start' and quickly immerse themselves in the day's new challenges. They love learning. They are inquisitive. They concentrate and persevere, even if something is difficult.
- Children's behaviour is exceptional. They share and cooperate very well. They will ask to join in or have a turn, and wait patiently for their chance knowing it will come. They have a well-developed sense of their own safety and that of others near them.
- Teaching is effective. Staff note children's achievements and interests and use this information to plan the following day's activities. In many ways, learning is personalised to each child. Disadvantaged children, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are given the necessary support to help overcome any difficulties they may be facing.
- Early reading, writing and number skills are taught well. Adults take every opportunity to use the many stimulating activities to consolidate and extend children's learning.
- Adults know the children very well and there are excellent procedures to get to know them and their families before they start. Assessment is as strong as elsewhere in the school.
- Most activities that children choose for themselves promote their personal and academic development. However, sometimes children select from a limited choice of equipment or materials, which restricts how they can go about learning.

- The early years is very well led. Adults are very well trained and work particularly well together as a strong and effective team. Safeguarding is effective and children's welfare needs successfully met.
- The relationship with parents is very positive. Parents appreciate 'stay and play', when they can share their children's learning. They say they are well informed about their children's progress, and appreciate the advice and information they are given to support their children's learning at home.

School details

Unique reference number	134685
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10023467

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary and Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	233
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Ford
Headteacher	Rachel Kirk
Telephone number	01923 678 240
Website	www.albanwood.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@albanwood.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 February 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is slightly smaller than an average-sized primary school.
- There is one class in each year group, from Reception to Year 6.
- The school also operates a Nursery class five mornings a week.
- 'Sunshine Class', a nurture group, meets in the afternoon.
- Roughly two thirds of pupils are from White British backgrounds. Of the remainder, the largest group are those of 'Any other White background'.
- Approximately one quarter of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium funding is above average.

- The overall proportion of pupils who receive support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average.
- In 2016, the school met the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations of pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school operates before- and after-school care five days a week.
- The school runs a 'farm'. Animals include chickens and rabbits.
- The deputy headteacher leads the school one day a week.
- The headteacher supports three primary schools as a 'Hertfordshire Improvement Partner'. Other teachers fulfil local roles as leading teachers or assessment moderators for 'Herts for Learning'.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited all classrooms. Some visits were conducted jointly with the headteacher or the deputy headteacher. In addition, the inspectors observed small groups of pupils being taught.
- The inspectors looked at work in pupils' books and listened to pupils read.
- The inspectors observed pupils in other activities and as they moved around the school and site.
- The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other leaders, teachers, other staff and governors. Inspectors also met with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors met with pupils to discuss their experiences at school.
- The views of 51 parents who responded to Parent View were taken into account. The inspectors also held informal discussions with parents. The inspectors considered the views of 37 members of staff and 68 pupils who responded to their online surveys.
- The inspectors looked at a range of school documents and information. These included the school development plan, checks on the quality of teaching, curriculum plans, minutes of meetings of the governing body, and pupils' behaviour and attendance records. The inspectors also looked at arrangements for safeguarding procedures, including relevant records.

Inspection team

Robert Greatrex, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Webb	Her Majesty's Inspector
Rod Warsap	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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