

Blakesley Church of England Primary School

The Green, Blakesley, Towcester, Northamptonshire NN12 8RD

Inspection dates

5–6 July 2016

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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher lives and breathes the school motto. She is 'the spark that lights the fire'. Her total dedication and commitment to achieve the best for pupils has led to the school's exceptional improvement since the previous inspection.
- Leaders, governors and staff share the same high expectations. They are aspirational for pupils and never complacent. They continually try to improve the quality of education the school provides.
- For the past three years, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, have left Year 6 having made outstanding progress.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They concentrate extremely well and demonstrate a love of learning in lessons. They are polite, caring and courteous.
- Leaders have worked hard to improve the quality of teaching and to provide teachers with highly effective training. This has led to rapid improvements in pupils' outcomes.
- Teachers plan lessons that enable pupils to learn exceptionally well. As a result, all groups of pupils make excellent progress and their attainment is outstanding.
- The exciting curriculum successfully captures pupils' interests and imagination. It enables them to make rapid progress.
- Leaders provide pupils with a wide range of opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. The school encourages pupils to try many things without fear of failure. This allows them to flourish and grow in confidence.
- Children in the early years learn very well because of the high-quality teaching and support that they receive. The well-resourced, vibrant and stimulating environment ensures that they are happy and focus well at all times.
- The school has excellent links with the local pre-school and secondary school. Pupils are very well prepared for the next steps in their learning.
- The school communicates well with parents. Parents appreciate this. They are extremely positive about the school and the high-quality education it provides.
- Leaders make sure that their systems for keeping pupils safe are robust and effective. All pupils say that they feel safe. They trust their teachers and know how to get immediate help if needed.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Track and monitor pupils' progress in all subjects, to ensure that it is consistently outstanding across the curriculum.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The headteacher provides exceptional leadership. Parents, staff and pupils are unanimous in their praise of her. She has led the school on an impressive journey of improvement. Her inspirational leadership and relentless pursuit of excellence are the main reasons why pupils' outcomes are outstanding.
- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has strengthened leadership across the school. She has created a culture that enables staff and pupils to excel. Middle leaders in charge of English and mathematics also provide excellent leadership. They are ambitious for pupils and work hard to make pupils' learning exciting and ensure that pupils continue to make exceptional progress.
- All staff in the school have a leadership responsibility. The headteacher has successfully communicated her aspirational vision with everyone so that staff have a shared sense of purpose. Staff feel part of a united team, with the pupils at the heart of everything that they do.
- The headteacher has made strong links with Blakesley Pre-school and Sponne School and the SWAN teaching school alliance. Staff work closely together across schools to share ideas about teaching and learning and to check that their assessments of pupils' work are accurate. As a result, the quality of teaching has vastly improved since the previous inspection.
- Leaders use teachers' performance management highly effectively to put in place individual training programmes to support professional development. Staff greatly value this. It has led to a supportive and sharing culture, where staff are happy to help each other to provide the highest standard of innovative teaching for all pupils. The headteacher makes sure that teaching assistants are included in this process. Teaching assistants receive excellent support and training which help them to provide exceptional support for pupils in lessons and ensure that all pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- Leaders do their utmost to prepare pupils for the wider world of life in modern Britain. Pupils recently learned about the European Union referendum. One parent told the inspector how her daughter had come home buzzing with excitement and asked to watch the news. She said, 'to see a nine-year-old enthused about politics and with her own clear views was truly incredible. The school brings the news alive for pupils.'
- Leaders provide pupils with excellent opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Pupils enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular clubs, trips and guest speakers. For example, pupils enthused about a recent opportunity to try skydiving. Pupils are brave learners who are unafraid to try new things and to support each other.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is broad and balanced but also engaging and meaningful for pupils. Pupils work on projects linked to the wider world such as Aztecs, Antarctica and safari. Teachers make sure that pupils develop their knowledge and understanding in English, mathematics, science, humanities and the arts through these projects. The school runs whole-school science and mathematics mornings on topics such as investigations into melting chocolate. Pupils work across year groups to develop their scientific discovery. All pupils learn French from Year 2 upwards and younger pupils enjoy songs and rhymes in French.
- Leaders are uncompromising in their ambition for all pupils. They have used the additional funding for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds highly effectively to provide them with support, guidance and intervention. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make excellent progress in English and mathematics. Leaders provide disadvantaged pupils with money to choose their own book collection, which they then name and keep in the school library. Pupils are excited about reading and encouraged to read more widely and often.
- Sports leaders have ensured that the sports funding has been used to encourage all pupils to find a sport which they can take part in and enjoy. They have bought curling, orienteering and archery equipment so that pupils have experience of wider sports. The vast majority of pupils at the school take part in a competitive sport in events including curling, archery, football, athletics, hockey, basketball, tag rugby, netball, swimming and tennis. Year 5 pupils work as sports leaders to provide activities at lunchtime for pupils who are reluctant to take up sport; this has been very well received. The most able pupils at sport have been well supported and many play for the county. The school's exemplary work has led to them winning the prestigious gold school games mark this year.
- Leaders provide pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities pupils with excellent support. Staff know pupils' needs well. They are skilled at tailoring appropriate intervention and support to ensure that vulnerable pupils are fully included in the school and make outstanding progress in their learning.

- Relationships between adults and pupils are excellent. The school strongly discourages discrimination of any kind and gives pupils equal opportunities to succeed, irrespective of their gender, background or ability. For example, leaders recently ran a 'can do week', where pupils learned about a range of jobs in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and sports activities to open up ideas for jobs which pupils might not have known about before.
- There were 53 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the vast majority were extremely positive about the school. All parents who spoke to the inspector had nothing but praise for the school and the 'fantastic' headteacher, particularly about the 'excellent communication' that they receive. One parent said, 'The school could not be any better.'
- The local authority has provided effective support to the school. They have helped the school to make accurate judgements about the quality of teaching and provide appropriate additional training when needed.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body has a very clear understanding of the school's effectiveness, including how well each individual pupil is doing. The headteacher provides governors with regular and appropriate information to help them carry out their role well. Governors provide the headteacher with strong support and challenge. The headteacher and governors work together to ensure the best outcomes for pupils.
 - Governors carry out their statutory duties diligently, including ensuring that the headteacher's performance management is rigorously assessed each year. They have a clear understanding of how the school use the pupil premium funding. They can talk about what has been done for each eligible pupil and the positive impact that it has had on their progress.
 - Governors bring a wide range of skills and expertise to support the headteacher. They are ambitious for the school and therefore determined to keep up to date with the latest information and training to enable them to fulfil their role well and continually improve the school. They have recently completed training in safeguarding and the safe recruitment of staff, and have strengthened their understanding of how to hold school leaders to account for pupils' academic performance.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders place pupils' safety as their highest priority. They have provided a range of assemblies and events on the risks associated with using the internet, dangers in the home and mental health. All pupils who spoke with the inspector said that they felt safe. Pupils all have five named people whom they can go to if they have any worries. The headteacher is tenacious in following up any referrals to external agencies until she is confident that she has done everything in her power to ensure that all pupils in her care are safe and protected.
- Staff all have up-to-date safeguarding training, including how to identify ways that pupils may be at risk from hearing extremist views. Pupils have also been informed about potential risks in ways that they understand. They talk knowledgeably about how to spot any dangers and have a range of strategies to use to keep themselves safe.
- All statutory safeguarding checks meet requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Reading, writing and mathematics are taught very well. Teachers have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They plan lessons that motivate pupils and ensure that they make excellent progress. Pupils listen intently in lessons and approach new learning with excitement and enthusiasm.
- Teachers provide exceptionally well for all pupils, including the most able pupils. Teachers plan work which involves the most able pupils using investigation and higher thinking skills. Pupils rise to the challenge. They are curious learners who are hungry for new knowledge.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have worked effectively to improve the teaching of mathematics. Teachers plan imaginative and challenging activities that encourage pupils to use problem solving to deepen their knowledge and understanding of mathematics. Activities are made practical and fun. As a result, pupils have achieved above national averages in mathematics for the past three years.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. They make sure that they take into account pupils' prior learning and then use questioning highly effectively to constantly check pupils' learning and progress throughout the lesson. They use well-planned resources and the vibrant classroom environment to stimulate pupils' learning. Teachers use time to maximum effect in lessons, they take every opportunity to develop pupils' learning.

- Teaching assistants are extremely effective in supporting pupils' learning. They have trained alongside teachers and are skilled in helping pupils to think things through for themselves and to help pupils develop their confidence and enthusiasm for learning.
- Leaders have prioritised pupils' love of reading. Pupils read with confidence and expression, they talk with enthusiasm and excitement about books. Pupils show high levels of understanding as they read. They can read between the lines and come up with their own ideas about the meaning of what they read. For example, a Year 1 pupil explained how a city could be lost because people had forgotten about it.
- Pupils are highly articulate. They have a very good level of vocabulary for their age and can talk with adults confidently.
- Leaders make sure that teachers' assessment is accurate. The cluster schools support each other to make sure that they all understand what level pupils are working at and that any pupils who are falling behind in English and mathematics are quickly identified and given additional support. As a result, teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding. Rightly, leaders have identified the need to track pupils' progress across all curriculum subjects even more closely, so that pupils make exceptionally good progress in all subjects.
- Pupils' work in books is of a high standard. Teachers all follow the school's marking policy. They make the next steps of learning clear to pupils. Pupils are given time to address any misconceptions in their learning; they demonstrate a determination to do their best and improve.
- Leaders provide parents with regular reports and feedback on pupils' progress. Parents speak appreciatively about the school's open approach to communication. Parents say teachers are always available if they have any questions. The school runs additional parents' workshops to inform parents about any changes in education. For example, the headteacher organised a series of events for parents to explain the new assessment system introduced this year. Parents now have a better understanding of age-related expectations.
- Teachers plan homework that deepens pupils' knowledge and understanding in a wide range of different curriculum subjects. All pupils who spoke to the inspector said that homework is set regularly and that they enjoy it.
- The headteacher is always looking at ways to improve the school further. A small minority of parents on Parent View said that homework could be improved, so the headteacher is reviewing the whole-school approach and plans to include parents fully in the process.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are confident and self-assured learners. They have fantastic attitudes to learning. They settle to work quickly, are intent on learning in lessons and respond well to challenge. As a result, they make outstanding progress.
- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school. Everyone is known and everyone supported. Relationships between adults and pupils, and between pupils and their classmates, are excellent. Pupils support each other socially and with their learning, encouraging each other to do well. All children in the Reception class are given a Year 5 or 6 pupil buddy when they join the school to help them get to know the school and have someone to look out for them. Leaders have created a supportive, caring and nurturing environment where there are no issues with transition between years and everyone supports each other to excel.
- The school effectively promotes pupils' welfare and healthy eating. Pupils run healthy eating competitions, for example, where prizes are awarded for pupils with the healthiest lunch box or for the pupils who eat the most fruit and vegetables in a week.
- Pupils are actively involved in the leadership of the school through a highly effective school council. They take on a variety of jobs in the school to learn about responsibility. For example, they take roles in assemblies to help with music and presentations, and work as sports leaders and lunchtime monitors.
- Parents said that the headteacher, teachers and staff always listen to them and are interested in each individual pupil. Staff are always easy to find and to speak to. Parents feel a part of the school and they are proud of their involvement with the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils who spoke with the inspector said that name-calling is extremely rare and that pupils care and look

after each other. They say that everyone is kind. The school has introduced a blue bench in the playground where any pupil can go if they feel lonely and then other pupils will know to invite them to play. However, the bench is rarely used.

- Leaders have effectively taught pupils how to keep themselves safe online. Pupils all know that if there is something that pops up on a computer that makes them feel uncomfortable, they should shut the lid immediately and tell a teacher straight away. Pupils also know how to keep themselves safe outside of school. They have total trust in their teachers.
- Incidents of bullying or poor behaviour are extremely rare. On the very few occasions that they do happen, teachers and other staff deal with them promptly and effectively and then they do not happen again. Parents' responses in Parent View are overwhelmingly positive about behaviour in the school. Pupils conduct themselves impeccably throughout lessons and at break and lunchtime.
- Pupils value their education and are rarely absent from school. They told the inspector that they could not think of any way to make the school even better and they cannot wait to go to school every day.
- Pupils take great pride in their school and its appearance. They talk enthusiastically about their learning and achievements and say that teachers make learning fun. They are smart in their uniforms and keep the school neat and tidy. They are particularly proud of the many colourful displays around the school which they have helped to create.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- Leaders have taken highly effective action since the previous inspection to improve pupils' outcomes. Pupils have made outstanding progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6 for the past three years.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in key stage 1. Pupils' attainment continues to be above national averages in English and mathematics.
- Children join the Reception year with most skills that are typically seen for their age. However, historically some children have started the school with lower levels of development in their understanding of English and mathematics. By the end of Reception, the vast majority of pupils make excellent progress across all areas. The school works closely with the local pre-school to support children's English and mathematics and provide training for staff. Children's knowledge and understanding in English and mathematics have improved greatly as a result. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development is well above national average.
- Leaders have been highly successful in using the pupil premium fund to support disadvantaged pupils. The school uses the funds to provide pupils with small-group support and intervention programmes in reading, writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils make outstanding progress, similar to that of other pupils, both in the school and nationally.
- The achievement of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is outstanding. This is because teachers and teaching assistants thoroughly assess pupils' needs and provide them with effective support and appropriate challenge in lessons.
- Pupils greatly enjoy reading and benefit from a well-stocked library. Teachers provide children with a secure understanding of phonics in the early years and children have a range of strategies to help them work out unfamiliar words. Pupils' results in the national phonics screening check in 2014 and 2015 were well above the national average. However, the phonics results in 2016 have dipped. This is because of a small cohort of pupils who did not achieve this measure, but still made good progress from their starting points. Pupils are highly articulate; they use sophisticated vocabulary for their age and can hold thoughtful conversations with adults.
- Teachers support the most able pupils very well and provide work that is challenging and appropriate to their needs. As a result, they make excellent progress. Their books demonstrate that they cope well with exploring topics in more depth. In 2015, the school were recognised in a national educational publication for the large proportion of Year 6 pupils who had achieved the highest possible grades in English and mathematics.
- Leaders have worked with other local primary schools to ensure that their internal assessments of pupils' work are accurate. The school's predictions closely match pupils' outcomes in externally marked tests. Leaders are confident that pupils continue to be on track to make excellent progress and work seen in pupils' books supports this.
- The school prepares pupils exceptionally well for the next stage in their education. Leaders have made close links with the local secondary school. Pupils have plenty of opportunities to visit the secondary

school and take part in events there. Teachers and pupils from the secondary school also come and support pupils' learning at Blakesley. As a result, pupils are confident about moving into Year 7 and eager and ready to start their secondary education. The headteacher is equally supportive of pupils and parents who go on to other schools further afield. Transition processes are exemplary.

Early years provision

is outstanding

- Children in early years make good progress by the end of Reception. This year more children have exceeded the progress expected than in previous years.
- Disadvantaged children are well supported and there are no gaps in the progress which they make compared to other children in early years.
- The school makes sure that all children receive a home visit before they start in Reception. Staff do their best to get to know children and families well and to start communication between school and home as early as possible.
- Teachers support children's emotional needs extremely well. When a Reception teacher recently went on maternity leave, the school prepared the children so that none of them was anxious when she left and they all understood what was happening.
- Since the previous inspection, the early years leader has transformed the early years provision for children. She has updated the indoor and outdoor areas to provide a range of enticing and purposeful activities. Children enjoy using the space and making choices about which resources to use. Staff make sure that there is the right balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities. Children have opportunities to engage in role play or to read books inside. Outdoors they have a choice of activities, including water, sand and climbing frames as well as places to practise their writing. Children all talk with particular enthusiasm for digging for worms in the mud.
- Teachers use accurate assessment to plan appropriately for the next steps that children need to take in their learning. They use 'learning journals' to record photographs, observations and evidence of the progress that children make. Teachers and teaching assistants contribute to these records. Parents are also fully involved and work closely with the class teachers to record every step in children's early development, both at home and at school. Parents were universally positive about this system. Since spring this year, the school and early years leader have worked closely with the pre-school to start these journals even earlier, so children are well known already when they start at Blakesley.
- Teachers help children with their early reading by sounding out words and using phonics. They provide children with plenty of opportunities to practise these in reading and writing and by using picture cards to choose sounds and spell words. The school also runs sessions for parents on phonics so that parents can better support their children at home.
- Teachers have high expectations for children and children's behaviour is excellent. They listen quietly when anyone else is speaking, are quick to follow instructions and queue up and wait in an orderly way when asked to. They look out for each other and help each other to learn.
- Teachers take every possible opportunity to develop children's key skills of reading, writing and numbers. Talk is encouraged at all times. Teachers ask questions which help children to speak in sentences and to understand that stories have a beginning, middle and end.
- Children in Reception work alongside Year 1 pupils and this helps with the seamless transition that exists between the two phases. The teacher and teaching assistant support every child appropriately according to their starting points and learning needs.
- All adults contribute positively to the caring and supportive environment and this very effectively promotes children's safety, welfare and social skills.

School details

Unique reference number	121959
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	10009126

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sarah Hyatt
Headteacher	Lucy Burman
Telephone number	01327860257
Website	www.blakesleyprimary.org.uk
Email address	head@blakesley.northants-ecl.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	16–17 January 2016

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The headteacher has been in post since January 2013.
- The large majority of pupils are White British, with a lower-than-average proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds. None speaks English as an additional language.
- Pupils are taught in three mixed-age classes: Reception and Year 1, Years 2 and 3, and Years 4, 5 and 6.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average.
- Very few pupils are supported by the pupil premium, which is the additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and for children looked after.
- The school meets the government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics at the end of key stage 2.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school runs a before- and after-school club during term time.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited six lessons, all of which were seen jointly with the headteacher. In addition, she visited two assemblies and heard some of the pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 read.
- The inspector observed the behaviour of pupils at break and lunchtime and as pupils moved around the school.
- The inspector scrutinised, in detail, a range of pupils' books in a range of subjects.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the governing body, staff and pupils. The inspector had a discussion by telephone with a local authority representative.
- The inspector looked at a wide range of the school's documentation, including the school's evaluation of its own performance, the school action plan, information on pupils' attainment and progress, attendance and behaviour records, safeguarding procedures, evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning and minutes of the governing body.
- The inspector took account of 53 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. There were no responses to the online staff or pupil questionnaires.

Inspection team

Sally Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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