

# Harpenden Free School

Tithe Barn, Harpendenbury Farm, Redbourne, AL3 7QA

## Inspection dates

27–28 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is not planned and targeted well enough to enable children to make good progress.
- Leaders have given high priority to ensuring pupils are happy and settled, but have not ensured that expectations for pupils' achievement are high enough.
- Pupils, particularly the most able, do not make enough progress in writing. This is because activities in lessons limit the amount they can achieve.
- Pupils are not provided with enough time to learn from teachers' marking of their work.
- Leaders have not made clear to teachers their expectations for good teaching. As a result, pupils have not been sufficiently challenged in their learning.
- High levels of instability in staffing, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage, have led to several changes in the way teaching is organised and as a result the pupils' learning has suffered.
- The new systems to track how well pupils are doing are not yet used by all teachers to closely monitor progress. As a result, actions to accelerate learning are not taken quickly enough.

### The school has the following strengths

- Pupils' personal development and happiness are at the heart of the school's work. Their learning is enriched through a wide range of exciting experiences and out of school activities. Teachers take care to identify each pupil's unique strengths and celebrate them.
- Recently-appointed middle leaders are already making a difference to the quality of teaching. The staff team are working more closely together and new ways of training are bringing about improvements.
- The governors, interim headteacher and director of learning have established the school with a strong sense of common purpose. They have taken robust action to acquire new premises, address underperformance and appoint a new Principal to enable the school's aims to be achieved.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors saw teaching in all parts of the school in 18 lessons. The lead inspector carried out a longer observation and a learning walk with the director of learning. Inspectors spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at their work. In addition, they listened to pupils read.
- Meetings were held with school leaders, two groups of pupils, governors, teachers and assistant teachers.
- Inspectors took account of 76 responses to the online (Parent View) survey and of letters written to them during the inspection. They spoke to parents as they brought their children to school and as they collected them. A learning session for parents led by the director of learning was observed.
- The team scrutinised a range of documents including the school’s self-evaluation, assessment information, teachers’ planning, short and long term improvement planning, policies and records of pupils’ behaviour and attendance, and those relating to safeguarding.
- Inspectors observed behaviour in lessons and at lunch time, and carefully scrutinised safeguarding arrangements.

## Inspection team

Prue Rayner, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Helen Morrison

Additional Inspector

Simon Hughes

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Harpenden Free School opened in September 2012 with pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage, Year 1 and Year 2. Its current location is temporary; school leaders are awaiting confirmation of the move to a new site for September 2014.
- It is smaller than the average-sized primary school. In the past year it has significantly increased in size and now has two Reception classes and a new Year 3 class. Plans are in place for it to increase to take pupils across the primary age range and to become a two-form entry school.
- The chief operating officer, who is also the interim headteacher, was appointed in the autumn term 2012 on a fixed term contract to manage the setting up and expansion of the school. A new Principal has been appointed and will take up post in September 2014.
- Most of the pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is well below average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled and those who have special educational needs at school action is below average but is increasing. The proportion at school action plus is also rising, it is currently above average. There are currently no pupils with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school started this academic year with just four members of staff from the previous year. 17 new members of staff including a new special educational needs co-ordinator started working at the school in September 2013.
- Teachers have additional help in classrooms from staff known as assistant teachers.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more pupils make expected and better progress by:
  - raising expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially in reading, writing and mathematics
  - planning activities which challenge the most-able pupils and ensure they practise key literacy skills frequently, particularly when writing
  - providing time for pupils to respond to, and learn from, the marking of their work.
- The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage must improve achievement by:
  - ensuring staff use the new procedures for recording and tracking children’s progress on a systematic and regular basis, and use this information to plan the next steps in learning
  - designing more activities for children so that they can practise the skills that they are learning
  - keeping a careful check on the planned improvements to teaching when they are implemented so that good use is made of all the time available
  - taking a more rigorous approach to reducing the children’s absence.
- Increase the effectiveness of the leadership and management of teaching by:
  - establishing a common understanding within the school of what constitutes good teaching
  - ensuring that expectations of teaching are high and that teachers learn from good practice and meet these expectations.



## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- The Year 2 class of children last year was very small. The overall attainment of this group was slightly above the national average in reading and mathematics. Fewer pupils attained the higher levels in writing than in reading and mathematics.
- Because the school is growing rapidly, there are continual fluctuations in the data about the progress and attainment of pupils. Current assessment information shows that pupils in Years 1 and 2 are making expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and are on track to attain results in line with the national average in reading and mathematics. The pupils' writing continues to lag behind their reading and mathematics at the higher levels.
- Work in pupils' books shows variable progress and in some instances it is not good enough. There are few examples of pupils using their writing skills in longer pieces of work. The work of the most-able pupils shows that they are not challenged sufficiently to produce work of the high standard that should be expected of them.
- Assessment information and the analysis of children's work in the Early Years Foundation Stage suggests that although the majority are working within the expected range, they have not made the progress of which they are capable and very few are exceeding skill levels that are typical for their age in most areas of learning.
- Standards of speaking and listening in the Early Years Foundation Stage are however, high. Children use a wide vocabulary to talk about their work and show great curiosity and interest in their learning. Their applied skills and levels of concentration, particularly in written work are less well developed.
- In Years 1 to 3, pupils make good progress in understanding the sounds that letters make (phonics) and use this knowledge well to sound out words when they read. They say they enjoy reading and talk knowledgeably about different books and authors. Their comprehension skills are in line with those expected for their age.
- It is too soon to evaluate the impact of the use of funding from the pupil premium on the achievement of eligible pupils because they have not been in school long enough for it to have made a difference.
- During the inspection, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs were observed to make good progress because of the well-targeted support they received. Over time their progress has not been as good.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

During the school's first year, changes in leadership and staffing resulted in uncertainty over agreed approaches to teaching. Expectations of what constitutes good teaching were not made clear and pupils were not sufficiently challenged to work hard and make good progress. Strengthened leadership and clearer guidance mean that teachers are working more closely together to improve teaching and demonstrate increasing expectations of what pupils should achieve.

- Procedures for assessing pupils' progress have improved this year. Assessment takes place regularly and is being used to set targets. Significant numbers of pupils start school at other

than normal entry times and information about their prior achievement is not always immediately available. Because detailed assessment is not undertaken until they have settled and feel secure, there is some lag in teachers making sure they quickly start to make good progress.

- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, some exciting and creative activities are planned. However, the teachers' expectations of what the children will learn are not clear enough in these activities. Children do not use their developing knowledge and skills well enough. Very recently implemented teaching approaches that better meet the needs of individuals and groups are starting to be more effective in enabling children to make better progress in their learning.
- Marking of pupils' work is up to date and comments tell pupils how well they have achieved against the expectations for lessons. However, in some classes, comments do not always provide pupils with enough guidance for the next steps in their learning. Pupils are not given enough time to respond to marking and so do not learn from their mistakes or address misconceptions.
- To extend and deepen pupils' learning, some lessons are longer than others. However, in most instances the extra time is not used well because teaching lacks pace and challenge, and it is unclear what the children are meant to learn.
- Teaching in mathematics and phonics is stronger than in other subjects because teachers' planning is better focused on what pupils need to learn. In these lessons, pupils make good progress because the work planned builds on their previous learning and teachers reinforce expectations, revisit knowledge and skills, and target their support where it is most needed.
- Assistant teachers make a good contribution to pupils' learning. Many pupils, including those eligible for the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs benefit from working in smaller groups which are planned to fill identified gaps in their learning.
- In some lessons, for example in Year 3, where there are significant changes in pupil numbers, teachers use their time carefully to support individual pupils to revisit things they find difficult, or to accelerate learning.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- In recognition of the needs of pupils in a rapidly growing school, leaders have placed a very high priority on ensuring that pupils feel safe and secure, and on supporting their behaviour. There has been a clear drive to establish a close sense of community and to nurture both pupils and staff. As a consequence, pupils have a strong sense of self-worth and are happy and settled.
- A significant number of parents mentioned to inspectors that their children's move to the school has been very carefully and effectively managed. They also said their children have developed greater confidence in their own abilities and a love for learning since joining the school. New staff and pupils develop their understanding of the school through a very effective 'buddy' system.
- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are lively and animated as they move around school; they show curiosity in their learning and express their ideas articulately. Pupils understand that they are expected to 'take care' of each other and of the school and its resources as the principal school rule. Behaviour is monitored regularly and records show that the high levels of care, intervention and support given to pupils are successful in improving instances of more challenging behaviour.

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils have close and trusting relationships with teachers and assistant teachers; they understand that bullying can be verbal, physical or related to race. They say there is no bullying and that when there is any unkindness, it is dealt with appropriately by adults.
- Although pupils show good understanding that the school's aim for learning to be boundless means 'you keep trying' and that instead of saying 'I can't', you can say 'I can't ... yet', the work in their books does not reflect the levels of resilience and concentration seen in their practical learning.
- Attendance is below average. Procedures are in place for managing pupil absence and it is analysed for patterns on a monthly basis. A high proportion of absence is related to the youngest children. The school does not authorise holidays taken in term time.

### **The leadership and management** requires improvement

- Significant changes to leadership and teaching appointments had to be made during the school's first year and further restructuring took place in January 2014. As a result, capacity to bring about the rapid improvement required as the school grows has been reduced. Actions have been taken to improve the leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage, to establish strong leadership of English and to implement rigorous and regular review of pupils' progress. These changes are too recent to have made the required differences.
- The school was established with an aspirational vision for both staff and pupils. The Chair of Governors is determined and knowledgeable, and has worked in strong partnership with the interim headteacher and with the director of learning, to manage the needs of a rapidly growing school community. The team are a strong driving force for change, but difficulties in recruiting staff and insufficient guidance for teachers on what constitutes good teaching, have prevented rapid improvement.
- The school development plan identifies ultimate expectations for the school against clear timescales and targets. It is underpinned by short term, concise action planning with appropriate delegated responsibilities for improving current provision. The interim headteacher has very effectively managed plans for the school's expansion and development.
- New tracking systems are in place. These are giving leaders a clearer understanding of pupils' attainment and progress. The director of learning has implemented regular meetings to hold teachers more directly to account for the pupils in their care; as a result, they are now planning for pupils to achieve more in lessons.
- Teachers and assistant teachers now benefit from strong support from the director of learning who exemplifies the school's values and provides one-to-one coaching for staff to develop their practice. Recently established systems for improving teaching are enabling more experienced teachers and leaders to model, share and develop good practice with their colleagues. As a result, teaching is improving and support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is more effective.
- Pupils learn through a rich and varied mix of subjects which incorporates a wide range of exciting learning opportunities both indoors and outdoors in a well-established Forest School. It is significantly enhanced by a range of visits which ignite interest in the topics pupils study, and

by an extensive schedule of lunchtime and after-school clubs. The primary school sports funding is being used effectively to provide specialist teaching, lunchtime and after-school coaching, and extra sports equipment.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. It is embedded in the subjects taught and is strongly reflected in the ethos of the school and in its ambitions for pupils.
- Parents spoken to, and those who wrote to inspectors, were supportive of the difference they believe the school is making to their children's learning. They say their children receive good support and are enjoy school. Inspectors observed a very good session for parents, led by the director of learning, focused on making learning 'playful'. A few parents raised concerns related to the uncertainty about when the school will be moving to its new site.
- Detailed risk assessments are in place which directly relate to the unique nature of the temporary school site. Decisive actions have been taken to secure pupils' safety. For example, because of concerns over the open nature of the site and the adjacent golf course, leaders have provided staff with advice on their positioning at playtimes and have put in place radio contact so that pupils are securely supervised.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governance is a strength of the school; governors have a clear and ambitious plan for the school's future achievements and use a wealth of expertise to benefit all aspects of the school's work. They have acted rigorously to address early concerns and have robust procedures in place to check the work of the school at all levels. Minutes of governing body meetings reflect the comprehensive understanding they have of the school's strengths and of how well it is addressing priorities. Governors ensure financial procedures meet requirements and that the school is achieving value for money. They have supported the implementation of procedures to link teachers' performance to their pay.
  - Governors acknowledge that their role is more operational currently than they expect it to be in the future. For example, while there has been uncertainty over leadership in the Early Years Foundation Stage, governors have used their expertise to audit its quality and identify key aspects requiring improvement. They are ensuring that all statutory requirements for safeguarding are met.
  - Governors have taken determined action to ensure they have appointed an experienced school leader to be Principal of this growing school from September 2014.



## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	138561
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	425163

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Free School
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–8
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	105
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The Governing Body
<b>Chair</b>	Ruth Martin
<b>Chief operating officer and interim headteacher</b>	John Gibson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01582 793840
<b>Email address</b>	info@harpendenfreeschool.co.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)  
[Store St](#)  
[Manchester](#)  
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2014

