

Courtlands School

Widey Lane, Plymouth, PL6 5JS

Inspection dates 19–20 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Courtlands School has improved well in all areas since the last inspection.
- Teaching has improved substantially so that it is now good and, as a result, the majority of pupils make better than expected progress.
- The school works exceptionally closely with parents to provide advice and support. Parents have a high opinion of the school. One parent commented, 'When my child came here, he couldn't talk at all and was withdrawn and within weeks he was transformed.'
- The well-informed and committed governing body, together with senior leaders, has an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development. Their self-evaluation of the school is succinct and information made available on the school's website is both excellent and readable.
- Pupils' behaviour and safety are exemplary. Pupils feel safe and are confident learners and regularly work well together in activities.
- The use of the outdoor environment to provide exciting and imaginative learning opportunities is innovative and is outstanding practice.
- Pupils benefit from a good selection of after-school clubs, such as sports and outdoor activities where pupils can cook food on campfires. These promote their personal and social development outstandingly well.
- The school works closely with other professionals, such as therapists, so that pupils are receptive to learning. For example, occupational therapists provide equipment to enable pupils to improve their posture so that they can concentrate on their work better.
- The school provides a wide range of memorable experiences and opportunities for pupils to enrich their lives.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The pace of learning slows when there is too much talking by teachers.
- The opportunities for pupils to use portable tablet technology to make learning more stimulating are not sufficiently developed.
- The use of signs and symbols, for those pupils who need them, are not used consistently across the school.
- Marking and target setting in pupils' work books are inconsistent.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 11 lessons, four of which were joint observations with different members of the senior leadership team.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, pupils, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspection team took account of the 16 responses from parents to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), considered the school's recent survey of parents' views and met with a group of parents, as well as considering responses from a questionnaire to staff.
- The inspection team looked at a range of documentation including the school's information on pupils' progress, its self-evaluation, development plans and information relating to the safeguarding of pupils.

Inspection team

Frank Price, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kim Bishop

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Courtlands is a school for primary-aged pupils with moderate learning difficulties and associated behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding (additional funding allocated by the government for certain groups of pupils, in this case those who are known to be eligible for free school meals, who are looked after by the local authority, or are children of service families) is above average.
- There are approximately twice as many boys than girls and most pupils are White British.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding and raise pupils' achievement by:
 - developing opportunities for pupils to make more use of information and communication technology, particularly portable tablets
 - improving the pace of learning through less teacher-directed talk and more activity by pupils
 - using signs and symbols for those pupils who need it more systematically
 - extending the best practice of setting pupils' targets and marking of their work, so pupils know what they are aiming for and how to improve.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The progress of pupils has improved well since the last inspection. In 2010, most pupils made the progress expected of them. However, since that time their progress has moved up a gear, so that now nearly all pupils make good or better progress.
- Pupils' progress in science is improving, but has not made the same rapid gains. The school has investigated the reasons for this and put in place suitable actions so that now pupils' progress is starting to accelerate well.
- The school has a strong focus on reading. Pupils are tested when they arrive at school and additional help and support are made available to those pupils who need it. This has resulted in good gains in pupils' reading ages, confidence and enjoyment of books. More able pupils read fluently and most know how to break down words that they are not familiar with.
- Some pupils need signs and symbols to help them understand the spoken or written word, but this approach is not used consistently enough throughout the school.
- Numeracy and literacy are taught well across a range of subjects. For example, in a science lesson, pupils used their mathematical knowledge to measure out 100 millilitres of water, and knew how many halves of lemons were needed to make a quantity of homemade lemonade.
- The use of the outdoor environment is excellent and pupils respond exceptionally well to this. A mixed class of Reception and Year 1 pupils worked well together and were able to find and match numbers in the field, which helped them to recognise and remember their numbers in a creative and imaginative manner.
- Pupils who receive the pupil premium make better progress, often from lower starting points than their peers. This is because they receive additional help, such as therapies, teaching support, or help with the cost of attending after-school clubs. This helps them to be better prepared to learn and develops their enjoyment and boosts their self-confidence very well. As a result, they are able to close the gap in their attainment, so that they are on an equal footing with everyone else.
- There is no underperformance in the progress that different groups of pupils make according to their special educational needs, gender, or ethnicity.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good across the school. There are some examples of outstanding teaching.
- Where teaching is outstanding, teachers set out very clear and high expectations for pupils. Lessons proceed at a rapid pace and pupils are eager to answer questions and demonstrate their understanding. Questioning is often used well to test and extend pupils' thinking. Teaching gets pupils actively involved in learning, so that they are engrossed. For example, pupils responded very well to a rapid-fire starter activity in mathematics where they were able to identify hundreds, tens and thousands of five-digit numbers, using the interactive whiteboard.
- Teachers regularly check pupils' understanding throughout the lesson, and at the end, and use a range of imaginative techniques to get pupils to verbalise what they have learned in the lesson.
- Teachers provide ample opportunities for pupils to work together. For some pupils this is a challenge, but over time they learn to how to cooperate and this becomes a well-established routine.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive and supportive. This helps to manage pupils' behaviour very effectively and results in big improvements in their behaviour.
- The use of other therapies in art, dance, music, speech and language are excellent, as these are used to maximise pupils' readiness for learning. For example, the coordination of some pupils is improved through the use of music and movement and this helps them in their physical coordination in physical education or in having better control skills when writing.

- On occasions, the pace of learning slows when there is too much teacher talk and not enough practical activity by pupils. As yet, the latest technology in the form of portable tablets has not been explored to see how this can further improve pupils' learning in class and to make the use of information technology an everyday tool to enhance learning.
- There are some excellent examples of clear target setting in pupils' work books and marking of work which sets out what pupils need to achieve and their next steps for learning, but these are not yet consistently applied across the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils' behaviour and safety in lessons and around the school are excellent. The pupils work happily in pairs and small groups and this is encouraged from an early age in school.
- At lunchtimes and break times, behaviour is excellent. Pupils are calm and purposeful. They enjoy using the outdoor areas. Pupils understand the school's sanctions and rewards. They are keen to gain green slips, which lead to a choice of rewards. One pupil honestly stated that he 'mainly gets green slips, though not all the time, as I'm no angel'.
- The use of fixed term exclusions is low and pupils' behaviour improves exceptionally well over time. Some pupils arrive at the school with difficult behavioural issues, but this is managed well and pupils learn to manage their behaviour very effectively.
- The school council represents pupils' views and the councillors confidently express these. The pupils feel listened to and their concerns or suggestions are acted upon.
- Pupils' attendance at the school is average. There are a few pupils whose attendance is poor, but the school is quick to work with families through the safeguarding team to ensure that attendance is seen as a high priority and this link with families does much to improve attendance.
- Pupils stated they felt safe at school and free from bullying of any kind. If there were any incidents they knew who they would confide in and were confident concerns would be addressed swiftly.
- There has been an increasing uptake of the after-school clubs and this provides enjoyment and has proved to be very successful in promoting pupils' personal development.
- Pupils' personal, social, moral and cultural development is fostered well. The external environment provides excellent opportunities for an appreciation of animal and plant life. Sporting and musical experiences and visits abroad widen and enrich pupils' cultural experiences.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, in conjunction with an enthusiastic governing body, provides excellent drive, vision and ambition and this has led to the school's good improvement since the last inspection. New initiatives, such as the outdoor learning, have been introduced and have made a positive impact on pupils' learning, personal and social development. This initiative has gained both local and national recognition.
- The pupil premium has been wisely spent and has had positive benefits for those pupils who have received additional help.
- The school's links with parents are outstanding. Parents value the close working relationship with the school and find staff helpful and ready to put themselves out. The school employs a parent support adviser to work with families and this is very effective. Links with other professionals, such as therapists and social services, are strong and these links benefit pupils greatly.
- Safeguarding of pupils is outstanding. Staff are well trained and are alert to any signs where pupils may be at risk and the school provides training to the local police safeguarding team.
- The school website is informative for a range of people, parents, pupils and other interested

parties. Complex information, such as the school's self-evaluation document, is simply presented enabling it to be easily understood.

- The setting of targets for teachers has ensured that teaching is consistently good and the school is aware that the task is now to secure more outstanding teaching. Regular checking of teaching has helped teachers to improve since the last inspection.
- The school provides a stimulating range of subjects and experiences for pupils. These include outdoor learning, after-school clubs, residential trips and visits abroad to places such as the Czech Republic, Poland and Spain. Pupils from these countries also visit the school and this contributes well to pupils' overall cultural development.
- The local authority has provided an appropriate level of support, such as help with literacy and numeracy and checking the quality of teaching through joint lesson observations.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is extremely knowledgeable, dedicated and works closely with the headteacher and senior leaders. The governors know from regular first-hand visits how good the school is. They are heavily involved in the school's self-evaluation and in determining future priorities to work on. They know teaching is good and understand what needs to be done to move it up to the next level. Governors have a clear understanding how the pupil premium has been spent and the benefits it has had on pupils. They have ensured there is a suitable link between pay and the quality of teaching in the school. They have not been afraid to tackle weak teaching where necessary. Governors understand the school's assessment information and have helped to make sure it is presented in a simple and easily understood format. They know how well their school compares with similar schools across the country. Governors have received good training in the areas of safeguarding, recruitment of staff, special educational needs and finances.

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

Unique reference number	113647
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	401380

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community Special
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	77
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Bickle
Headteacher	Lee Earnshaw
Date of previous school inspection	23–24 June 2010
Telephone number	01752 776848
Fax number	01752 769102
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