

Palmarsh Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118490
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	358363
Inspection dates	19–20 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Norma Ball

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Cannon
Headteacher	Michael Anthony Alexander-Webber
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited nine lessons as well as small teaching groups out of class. They observed six teachers. They met parents and carers informally on the first day of the inspection, and held meetings with the headteacher, teaching staff, members of the governing body and pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised samples of pupils' work, the school's systems for tracking pupils' progress, management and curriculum documentation, teachers' planning and safeguarding documents. In addition, inspectors took account of questionnaire responses from 19 parents and carers, 9 staff and 42 pupils in Years 3 to 6.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- What steps are being taken to improve achievement, especially in English in Key Stage 2?
- How well does the school analyse the progress made by groups of pupils and what measures are in place to improve attainment for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those of higher ability?
- How well is assessment information used to identify underachievement, to plan work that challenges all pupils, and to involve pupils in their progress?
- How rigorous and effective are leaders and managers at all levels in monitoring the work of the school and driving school improvement?

Information about the school

Palmarsh is a small school with three mixed-age classes. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who come from minority ethnic backgrounds is much smaller than that found nationally and a few of these pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is much higher than average and includes mostly pupils with moderate learning difficulties. An above average proportion of pupils enters and leaves the school part way through this phase of their education. The school's roll has continued to fall year on year as a result of local demographic changes but numbers have now stabilised. The school has the Healthy School award. The First Steps Nursery shares the school site, but is not managed by the governing body and so was not part of this inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. Pupils behave well and enjoy their learning because they are taught successfully and lessons are interesting. Their progress is carefully monitored and they have clear targets which help them identify what they need to learn next. Pupils show care and respect for each other and the adults who care for them. They have a good understanding of how to keep safe and follow a healthy lifestyle. Parents and carers value all that the school provides and one said, 'This school is absolutely brilliant, and the relationship the staff have with the children is excellent. Can't praise the school enough.'

Children settle quickly in Reception and develop confidence and independence. They enjoy their learning experiences, although the range of activities planned for them in the outside learning area is limited and does not stimulate their imaginative play consistently. In the two mixed-age classes for Key Stages 1 and 2, there are year-on-year variations in the attainment of pupils arising from the changing characteristics of small year groups. Added to this, the school has experienced higher than average mobility as pupils leave and join the school at different times. In 2010, for example, one third of the pupils in Year 6 were new to the school. Analysis of the progress made by pupils from their individual starting points indicates they made good progress in their time in the school in mathematics and in English.

The school cares for a higher-than-average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Their needs are quickly and accurately assessed. They receive good individual support and, as a result, make good progress. Effective action has been taken to improve progress in English and the school's own tracking, together with inspection evidence, indicates that pupils' progress is good. Effective individual short learning sessions for pupils who find learning difficult have prove successful in improving their progress and plans are now in place to use similar sessions to provide more challenge for pupils of higher ability.

Teaching is good and assessment information is used well to plan tasks that challenge all groups of pupils as well as set clear targets for pupils in literacy and numeracy. The curriculum provides a broad range of learning experiences. Links made between different subjects make learning fun and provide good opportunities for pupils to extend their literacy and numeracy skills. The care, guidance and support provided for all pupils are good. This extends to the whole family and is augmented by good links to a range of external agencies.

The headteacher works in close partnership with the deputy headteacher and together they provide strong and effective leadership for a united team of staff. The governing body is knowledgeable and provides good challenge for leaders and managers as well as strong support. Governors know the school well and monitor carefully all areas of its work. Community cohesion is good and safeguarding arrangements are well managed and

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securely integrated into the school. Self-evaluation is accurate, all leaders and managers demonstrate a strong will to move the school forward and there is a good capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of pupils in Year 6 who attain the highest levels in English and mathematics by building on the good challenge planned in lessons with additional sharp, targeted individual support out of class to improve progress.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, improve the planned use of the outdoor learning area, especially providing an exciting range of resources to stimulate children's imagination and encourage them to develop their own games.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The attainment of pupils fluctuates because of the varying characteristics of small year groups of pupils, but is broadly average. Despite and apparent dip in attainment in English and mathematics in 2010, the progress made by pupils was at least satisfactory and good for those who had been in school for most of Key Stage 2. The school has continued to focus on improving vocabulary and inspiring writing by selecting interesting themes in English, and a focus on problem solving and mental calculations in mathematics. In addition, more individual tuition for pupils whose learning lags behind has had a positive impact on accelerating progress. As a result, the school's own careful tracking of progress, together with inspection evidence, indicates that progress in both English and mathematics is good and attainment is broadly average. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their individual starting points because of the good support they receive in class and in carefully planned out-of-class individual support. Pupils who speak English as an additional language contribute well to lessons and make good progress.

In a mathematics lesson for pupils in Years 5 and 6, a rapid mental mathematics starter required pupils to answer a range of questions against the clock. Pupils were excited by this task, were alert and enthusiastic so they settled quickly in the lesson. Pupils made good progress in consolidating their skills in doubling and halving numbers because the task was well structured to meet the needs of different age and ability groups. A Year 4 literary lesson allowed pupils to develop their creative stories in an imaginative setting well. Boys in particular loved the chance to select exciting themes and settled to the writing task keenly. Themes, such as 'Time Machines' and 'The Land of the Zombies', inspired their writing and all pupils made good progress. Drafts were corrected and spelling and grammar checked before a final fair copy was prepared. Pupils work hard and do their best because they find learning fun. One pupil said, 'I like our school lots because we have loads of things to do. Teachers make lessons fun so you understand and they help you lots.'

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, although a few older boys can sometimes get over excited at playtimes. School councillors have an effective voice in the school and represent their classmates' views maturely. In the fundraising events and contributions to their local area, pupils show a regard for the needs of others. Attendance remains average because, despite the best efforts of the school, a few families do not assign a high priority to regular attendance. Pupils feel safe in school and the Healthy

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School award is testament to the good understanding pupils have of what makes for a healthy lifestyle. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and reflected in the good relationships and awareness of other cultures in Britain and around the world. There is a strong link with a school in Uganda and a gift of skipping ropes made by hand from banana leaves was recently received. The good achievement of pupils, together with their good personal development, ensures pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good and assessment information is used well to plan activities in lessons that challenge all groups of pupils. Clear targets, which pupils find helpful, are set for them in literacy and numeracy. Pupils contribute to this process by assessing their own learning and identifying what they understand and where they need further help. Careful planning ensures that work is well matched to the needs of different age groups in each class. Marking is regular and identifies how and where a piece of work can be improved. Teachers have good subject knowledge, set clear objectives for lessons and use questioning well to ensure that pupils are encouraged to explain their ideas and extend their speaking skills. This is especially true for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities who take a full part in class and group discussions and are encouraged to develop their independence. In most lessons, learning proceeds at a lively pace but

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occasionally introductions to lessons can be slow and pupils' interest drifts for short periods. Teaching assistants are well deployed and provide good support to pupils in a variety of settings.

The curriculum meets the needs of pupils well. In addition to the initiatives to improve progress in literacy and numeracy, the development of cross-curricular themes provides additional opportunities for pupils to extend their writing and number skills. In Years 2 to 4, a theme of 'Roman Britain' has allowed pupils to carry out research using the school computers, experience Roman food and make a variety of artefacts in design and technology as well as see the Romans in their historic context. Enrichment of learning outside the classroom in clubs and the trips made out of school, although limited in number, are carefully planned to provide another dimension to learning and contribute to pupils' personal development. For example, a good link has been developed with a school in France that provides opportunities for regular exchange visits by pupils.

The care, guidance and support provided by the school are good and regarded as a high priority by all staff. Induction arrangements, at whatever stage pupils join the school, are well organised and tailored for individual needs. Transfer arrangements to a range of secondary schools are likewise organised with care to ensure pupils are confident about the move and parents and carers are well supported with family interviews organised by the headteacher. The assessment of pupils' needs is rapid and support networks planned by the school are flexible and respond quickly to changing circumstances. Links with a wide range of agencies and support services are used prudently by the school to extend the care and guidance provided for both pupils and their families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, in partnership with the deputy headteacher, provides clear and confident leadership for the school. All members of staff recognise the challenges posed by small year groups in mixed-age classes and the changing needs of pupils. They are united in their ambition to continue to improve the school. Well-chosen strategies have been integrated through the school and these have led to improvements in the progress made by pupils since the last inspection. Areas identified in the previous inspection report for improvement have been resolved or remain active work in progress. Leaders and managers are not complacent. They have identified the value of one-to-one support in the small school setting and plan to extend this further. There is no evidence of discrimination in the school. All pupils are treated fairly and equally so they make good progress from their own starting points.

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Parents and carers are kept well informed of their children's progress and all new developments. The safeguarding of pupils' welfare is good and supported by policies that are well integrated in the school. Community cohesion is promoted well and pupils are gaining awareness of the wider dimensions of their local community as well as developing an understanding of their future role as national and global citizens. The governing body, together with school leaders and managers, monitors carefully all aspects of the school's work and future developments are based on an accurate assessment of the school's strengths and its potential for improvement.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children quickly develop a positive approach to school and learning because they receive good care. They enter Reception with a range of skills and abilities, but these are often below expectations for their age, especially in elements of language and numeracy. Children settle quickly, gain in confidence and learn to be independent so they make good progress in all areas of their learning. Teacher-led learning sessions are well planned and provide stimulus for children and develop their skills effectively. Staff join in children's games well and especially help them to extend their speaking skills. However, opportunities are missed to encourage children's imagination and the excitement of exploration in the outdoor learning area because children are not routinely tempted with a range of well-prepared interesting resources and activities.

Children follow routines well. They learn to tidy things away sensibly and to put on warm or waterproof clothes to use the outside learning area. They play well together and enjoy finding out about new things. For example, discovery of fossils and dinosaur footprints led one boy to devise his own jungle area so that 'little dinosaurs have somewhere nice to play'. Leadership and management are good and the shared responsibility for Reception

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and Year 1 is well planned and effective. All six areas of learning are covered appropriately in planning. Children's development is monitored regularly and this information is used well to keep parents and carers well informed about the progress their children are making. A good recent innovation has been a diary for each child which links home and school. The diary provides a regular personal record for parents and carers including photographs and examples of their child's work and activities.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Most of the parents and carers who returned inspection questionnaires, and those who spoke to inspectors, are pleased with all aspects of the school. They value the fact that their children enjoy school and are safe. Parents and carers are happy with their children's experience of school and feel that the school is well led and managed. A very few parents and carers expressed concerns about behaviour. The inspection found behaviour was good in lessons and around the school. However, a few older boys can sometimes get over excited at playtimes. Instances of silly behaviour are managed well. The positive views of parents and carers were summarised well by one parent who said, 'Excellent school. Looks after children's individual needs.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Peter and St Paul Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 19 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 74 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	15	79	4	21	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	17	89	2	11	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	14	74	5	26	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	13	68	5	26	1	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	14	74	4	21	1	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	8	42	11	58	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	9	47	10	53	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	8	42	8	42	1	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	13	68	5	26	1	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	8	42	8	42	2	11	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	53	7	37	1	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	16	84	3	16	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	15	79	4	21	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



24 January 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Palmarsh Primary School, Hythe CT21 6NE

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and being so helpful and polite to us. We enjoyed talking to you and looking at the exciting work you do. We watched with great interest some of the dramatic battle between the Romans and the Celts that Class 2 performed in the hall as part of their Romans project. It was really exciting.

We were impressed to see how much you enjoy your lessons and you told us you find learning fun because teachers make your lessons interesting. You get on together and behave well. You know a lot about being safe and healthy. We think that you make good progress in your time at Palmarsh and you are well cared for. You make a good contribution to your community and are learning a lot about the world in which you live. Your headteacher, other staff and the governing body work well together to make your school a happy place in which to learn.

You told us yours was a good school and we agree with you. We have suggested two things which we think would help to make your school even better.

- To make learning more challenging for pupils of higher ability in Year 6, we have suggested that they have opportunities to work individually with a teacher for short periods to help them make even better progress.
- So that Reception children have good opportunities to devise games and activities when they are playing, we have asked that more thought be given to the way resources are used in their outside learning area to make it more exciting.

You can help by continuing to work hard and doing your best at school. It was a great pleasure to visit Palmarsh and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Norma Ball

Lead inspector

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