

Rodmersham Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118346
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	379601
Inspection dates	21–22 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Wendy Simmons

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	90
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Roche
Headteacher	Malcolm Saunders
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2009
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. One inspector was in school for half a day and the lead inspector was in school for two days. In total, 13 lessons were observed in conjunction with shorter observations in classrooms and in the school's extensive grounds. Five teachers were seen teaching along with teaching assistants. Meetings were held with the staff and the governing body. The lead inspector met with parents and carers informally and evaluated their responses in the 42 questionnaires. Discussions were held with groups of pupils in addition to the analysis of their 47 questionnaires. Staff returned 15 questionnaires. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at the improvement plans, policies, samples of pupils' work and assessment information.

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

- How well leaders and teachers are working to improve the outcomes, especially for the most able pupils in English and mathematics.
- How well teachers are enabling pupils to learn independently and creatively.
- Children's attainment on entry and how well the Early Years Foundation Stage has developed since the last inspection, especially for the most able.
- The achievement for pupils currently in the school, especially in Year 6.
- Whether pupils' behaviour and their feelings about being safe and their adoption of healthy life styles are particular strengths of the school.

Information about the school

Rodmersham is a smaller than average school. Most pupils attend from a radius of one mile around the village. Nearly all the pupils are of White British heritage and a few are from mixed race or Black African backgrounds. Occasionally there are Traveller pupils from Irish heritage. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average. Most of these pupils have difficulties with literacy, including pupils with dyslexia. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is much lower than average. Pupils enter the Early Years Foundation Stage at the school in the Reception class. The school has received the Activemark and a Healthy School award. Since the last inspection, there have been considerable changes to staffing. The school is housed in accommodation that is almost 150 years old. The role has risen by just over 20% since the last 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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Rodmersham is an outstanding school where pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their future lives. The school is led by an inspirational headteacher and a highly skilled and dedicated team of staff who are well supported by the governing body. One pupil's words summed up the views of others when saying, 'Our headteacher is very active and great fun, the school would not be complete without him.'

Pupils are known and treated as individuals. This contributes greatly to why relationships are very harmonious and why this is an exceptionally happy and inclusive school. The promotion of equal opportunities is at the core of all that the school does; this aspect of the school's work is also outstanding. Pupils explained, and inspectors endorse, that teaching is often fantastic, everyone is kind and helpful and, activities are fun and challenging. The quality of teaching, learning and the care provided, together with the curriculum, are all judged to be outstanding. There is a superb partnership with parents and carers.

Parents, carers and pupils are delighted with the school and feel that there is an excellent partnership, so that everyone is working together to do the best for the pupils. Pupils are an immense credit to themselves, their parents, carers and their school because they almost always behave exceptionally well and show respect and kindness to others. Moreover, they are enthusiastic and hardworking.

As a consequence of the highest quality leadership, which includes very rigorous self-evaluation, the school has improved in a very impressive way. It has moved up two grade boundaries since its last inspection. Almost all areas of school life show marked change for the better. Most notably, there has been a rapid rise in the attainment and progress of all groups of pupils, including the most able and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This has resulted in a three year pattern of high attainment and outstanding achievement. Pupils' awareness about how to adopt healthy lifestyles is a particularly impressive element of their wider personal development and is enriched by the many opportunities for sport, exercise, emotional well-being, fresh air and healthy eating.

Based on the impact of leaders' work in two and a half years, the school has an exceptionally strong capacity to continue improving and provides outstanding value for money because the outcomes for pupils are superb. Even so, leaders are never complacent and always want to do even more, as they are constantly looking for ways to fine-tune the school's improvement even further. At the moment, they are

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correctly exploring ways to extend the internal school accommodation, as it is far too cramped for the rising numbers of pupils attending the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Rigorously pursue opportunities to extend and improve the internal accommodation of the school, so that the school is less cramped and can provide the best possible learning environment for its pupils.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils thoroughly enjoy learning because they are helped to develop positive self-esteem so that they have the confidence to try difficult new things and persevere. Activities are usually fun and meaningful. For example, Years 1 and 2 enjoyed working as a team to move a huge sheet around when exploring shadows in the sunshine. Years 5 and 6 had great fun in a history lesson when comparing the impact of enclosures during the Middle Ages by acting out the parts of wealthy land owners and poor farm workers. This was made even more fun when they sowed some seeds in the field and then considered the impact of the invention of machinery such as that invented by Jethro Tull. This work then flowed effortlessly into their writing. Years 3 and 4 were actively incubating chicken and duck eggs. They were thrilled to observe two real hens, provided by a parent, while working on charcoal sketching in art. All of these examples demonstrate the excellent way in which pupils work outside. This is invaluable as the internal accommodation is too cramped to do such things as large art work and some practical experiments.

Pupils are very proud and confident in sharing their opinions and ideas and this supports their learning in English and mathematics especially well. This is aided by the rigorous and progressive development of skills as pupils move through the school. When comparing biographies and autobiographies, pupils in Years 5 and 6 explored the life of Barak Obama. This, when added to their well-developed understanding of different cultures, contributes much to their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils said that the assemblies are joyful occasions. They spoke about how they are thrilled with the recently installed climbing wall and the opportunity to run their own healthy tuck shop.

All groups of pupils do very well at this school. Almost all pupils reach the expected average Level 4 and indeed often 100% of pupils attain this, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities such as dyslexia. The most able pupils do even better because leaders and staff are securely focused on ensuring that increasing proportions reach the higher Level 5. For example, in the current Year 6, over half of all pupils are on track to gain this level in English and mathematics. The trend for improving outcomes is evident throughout the school. Traveller pupils, past and present, thrive here because the headteacher insists on good attendance and works closely with parents and carers to help their children succeed.

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Pupils confirm that they feel safe because, as pupils said, there are always people to help them. This element of the school’s work is not yet outstanding as a very few pupils who responded to the questionnaire were less certain about how safe they felt at school. Leaders are going to explore this further in their usual sensitive way with the pupils. It is important to note that, on the day of the questionnaire, there had been a fire drill. Although this went very smoothly, for a few pupils this may have impacted on their response to the questionnaire. Pupils confirmed that bullying is almost unheard of in the school and taken very seriously if an incident should occur.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils’ behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Links between different subjects and numerous visits enrich pupils’ learning very successfully. There are a very good range of clubs for a small school and it is clear why the school has been awarded the Activemark and a Healthy School award. Lessons are very well planned and almost always ensure a degree of flexibility to allow for spontaneous learning, extended discussions and revisiting of things that pupils need more help with. This reflects the very good questioning by staff and the highly effective on going assessments of pupils’ needs. Teachers are very often supported by highly skilled teaching assistants, and lessons often have a ‘wow’ factor, which demonstrates the very inspiring and exemplary curriculum.

Work is planned very well for pupils of all abilities and the care given to individuals is exemplary. This not only helps them to make very good gains in their academic

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

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learning but ensures that they are very well supported when they have worries. For example, friendship concerns, bereavement, and social skills are treated with sensitivity, so that pupils overcome their difficulties. Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to enable pupils to learn in different ways. Pupils are made aware of their targets in all areas of learning and these are skilfully fed into lessons and evaluated carefully to extend their learning. For example, following the arrival of a surprise nest, which contained huge coloured eggs (hidden by the teacher), pupils in Years 3 and 4 were totally absorbed about writing creatively and were helped exceptionally well to re-shape, edit and improve their work throughout the lesson. As a result, they all invented an extended story and achieved their target of using more complex sentences with a variety of joining words and descriptive vocabulary. Teachers plan plenty of opportunities for pupils to think creatively and independently. In mathematics, basic skills such as addition, subtraction, multiplication and division are rigorously taught. Sometimes the space in classrooms means that there are no opportunities for pupils to work quietly away from the main group. Teachers are working more on real-life problem-solving than they did and are continuing to extend this.

Very well targeted additional support enables pupils to consolidate and extend their learning quickly. One-to-one support takes place in the very small staff room, which is far from ideal, and this room is also required for meetings, pupils who are poorly and staff professional development time. Despite this, excellent attention is given to all aspects of care, guidance and support. Pupils have high levels of confidence in the school’s ability to advise them effectively. The school’s work with families is greatly valued by parents and carers.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

There is a very strong sense of vision and drive from all staff. The headteacher explained it thus: ‘I am the oil that ensures the school can develop and my staff are the wheels that help the school to move on quickly.’ The emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning has been immense; for example, there has been a massive increase in the use of ICT as well as a complete review of the curriculum to make it more creative. Teachers have become far more skilled at teaching reading and, within this, making reading more inviting for reluctant male readers. Recently, the focus on writing has led to increased opportunities for pupils to do extended writing.

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Staff ensure that the differing skills and talents of individual pupils are celebrated and developed. The needs of the most able, as well as those who need extra help, are very well met. The expectations for Traveller pupils are exceptionally high. Any form of discrimination is not tolerated. Opportunities for all are equally impressive.

The care of pupils is underpinned by good safeguarding arrangements. Staff are well trained and procedures run smoothly, so that vulnerable pupils are monitored carefully. Health and safety procedures are good and have been enhanced by a knowledgeable governor. In lessons, there is good attention to being safe.

The governing body have developed their skills considerably since the last inspection. They challenge the staff to be accountable for their work and they have a good understanding about the progress pupils make. They have worked well to include parents and carers far more in the school’s self-evaluation process and are currently working to become even higher profile in monitoring the daily work of the school. They benefit from having a wide range of expertise on the governing body. In particular, they have overseen the massive improvement in the outside learning environment. This improvement is an exemplary feature, which contributes to pupils’ enjoyment of lessons and the adoption of healthy lifestyles.

Originally, the school had been designed for 30 pupils; this has now increased to 90. However, while the outside space is very large, the school’s internal accommodation is extremely cramped. The lack of a school hall, library, additional teaching areas, or suitably sized rooms for private discussions or quiet support work hampers leaders in fulfilling some of their superb ideas to further improved provision. Some spaces are so cramped that large scale creative art work is impossible, and indoor physical education and meetings often have to be done in the local village hall.

The school is at the centre of the community. Since the last inspection, links have been made with a town school in Ashford and with a school in Jamaica. Staff work hard to include parents and carers who might otherwise have found it hard to be involved with the school. It is very hard for the school to invite other schools to visit, due to the limited space, and this is a factor in why community cohesion is not yet outstanding.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2

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The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
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	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children love attending the Reception class and parents and carers are totally delighted with the warm and caring ethos and their rapid development. As one explained, 'I have been blown away by the welcome and how we can also be involved in lessons', while another said, 'It's fantastic, my child just loves it.'

Staff work very hard to provide a range of exciting inside and outdoor learning activities, which inspire the children to concentrate, talk and work well with others. The emphasis on children's communication and personal development is especially impressive. For example, children learned much about the heart when the teacher encouraged them all to use stethoscopes and listen to the 'boom boom boom' of the heartbeat. They then had the opportunity to look closely at a real heart under the microscope. Adults nurture and encourage children in a very sensitive way and have high expectations for them. Children achieve outstandingly well because teaching is very good. In recent years, all reach the average level expected by the end of their Reception Year and many exceeded this. As a result of very focused leadership, they are now working to help even more of the most able children to reach the very highest levels in their attainment and they are well on track with this. In the last three years, attainment has risen immensely, reflecting the outstanding leadership.

The Reception class has been housed in temporary accommodation for six years and although it provides outstanding provision and outcomes overall, because staff are very skilled, the building is far from ideal.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

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Views of parents and carers

There was a higher than average response to the questionnaires. Parents and carers could not speak more highly of the school and how they have seen it change.

Everyone comments about this being a very happy school and this is evident from the moment of arrival. As one explained, 'My child came to the school in Year 5, he was a changed character, even in his excellent test results.' Others spoke about the way that their children grow in confidence and the way that families are supported as a whole. Inspectors endorse the views of parents and carers that the school has many exemplary features.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Rodmersham 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 42 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 90 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	23	55	18	43	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	29	69	13	31	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	26	62	12	29	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	22	52	18	43	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	25	60	14	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	28	67	12	29	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	27	64	14	33	1	2	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)	23	55	16	38	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	21	50	19	45	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	24	57	16	38	1	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	57	13	31	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	30	71	10	24	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	28	67	14	33	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.



23 September 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Rodmersham Primary School, Sittingbourne ME9 0PS

It was a great pleasure meeting you all during our recent visit. Thank you so much for talking to me about your school. We agree with you that you go to a fantastic school; we call this outstanding. Like you, we think your headteacher leads the school excellently. All of the staff want the very best for you and they work very closely with your parents and carers to make this happen.

There are so many things that have impressed us about all that you do and about how well the adults in the school are working together amazingly well to make the school a very happy, caring and successful place. In particular, we have found that because the teaching is often of exceptionally high quality and because activities are usually great fun, you work very hard and make excellent progress in all subjects, especially in English and mathematics. Well done for this, and please keep working hard and behaving so outstandingly well.

All of these very impressive things combine together and enable you to do much better than pupils in many other primary schools, and this means that you are very well prepared for your life in secondary school. We could see that you all have similar opportunities and benefit from very good support in your work and if you ever feel unhappy or worried. You agree that this is a very happy and caring school. Please keep up the super work on being fit and healthy! What wonderful outside grounds you have to help with this. We were delighted to see you all busy working outside when we visited. We want the school to become even better in the future by doing the following important thing;

- trying to give you more inside space to work in, as it is very cramped. We know that you would like this as well.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Simmons
Lead inspector

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