

Smarden Primary School

Pluckley Road, Ashford, Kent, TN27 8ND

Inspection dates

14–15 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The executive headteacher has driven significant improvements quickly. She is strongly supported by experienced and knowledgeable governors, effective senior leaders and committed staff.
- The intense focus on raising standards and quality of teaching can be seen in pupil outcomes and the learning environment. The school's actions are focused in the right areas to improve the school even further.
- Since the last inspection attainment has improved and compares well to national averages at the higher levels for the oldest pupils.
- Pupils make good and sometimes better progress, particularly in reading.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language, those eligible for the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are supported well so that most make good progress.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in improved behaviour and above-average attendance, which continues to rise.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Although the overall quality of teaching is improving, not enough is yet outstanding. This is the main reason why achievement is not yet consistently outstanding across the school.
- In a minority of lessons, pupils' learning is not fully extended. This means that in some classes a minority of pupils do not always make as much progress in writing and mathematics as they could.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at one day's notice by one additional inspector.
- Seven lessons were visited, all of them jointly with school leaders.
- The inspector also read with pupils, and observed the teaching of reading across the school and the use of sounds and letters across Key Stage 1.
- The school's website, pupils' work, policies, safeguarding and monitoring and evaluation documents were scrutinised. Information relating to performance management and professional development were also looked at and discussed with staff.
- Meetings and discussions were held with governors, teachers, pupils and a representative of the academy trust.
- Twenty-five responses to the online parent questionnaire were also taken into account.
- The inspector also took account of 11 questionnaires returned by staff.

Inspection team

Narinder Dohel, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Smarden Primary converted to become an academy school on 1 October 2011. When its predecessor school was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be satisfactory.
- This is one of two schools led by an executive headteacher and is part of an academy trust.
- This is a smaller-than-average school.
- Most pupils are from a White British background. The remaining pupils are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Very few pupils are learning English as an additional language.
- The proportions of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action and school action plus are below those in most schools. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is also below national average.
- Approximately 5% of pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. Currently there are no looked-after children or pupils from service families in the school. This is below the average for most schools and equates to only a few pupils across the school.
- The executive headteacher, the leadership team and many of the teaching staff have joined the school within the last two years and work across both schools.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Move teaching to outstanding by ensuring that all teachers:
 - always provide an appropriate level of challenge
 - ask questions that deepen and extend pupils' learning
 - provide more time and opportunity for pupils to demonstrate their learning and understanding.
- Raise pupils' achievement from good to outstanding by:
 - improving rates of progress in writing and mathematics more evenly across the school
 - checking pupils' learning regularly in lessons and swiftly moving pupils on to the next task
 - using information gained from evaluating learning more quickly to target those pupils making slower rates of progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- By the time pupils leave the school in Year 6, attainment is broadly in line with national average. Attainment at the higher levels by the end of Key Stage 2 is rising. The 2012 results show that increasing numbers of pupils are achieving at the above-average Level 5, particularly in mathematics.
- Pupils start school in Reception working with the skills and experiences expected for their age. The high-quality experiences and teaching ensure that they make at least good progress, particularly in their understanding and use of the sounds that letters make (phonics).
- Rates of progress and levels of attainment are increasing through Key Stage 1 and a greater proportion of pupils are now working at the higher levels for reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils, whatever their ability or backgrounds, make good progress. Progress in reading is strongest and most consistent across the school. This is because there has been significant investment in the time, resources and strategies used to develop pupils' reading skills. Although progress in writing and mathematics is also improving, this progress is not yet as consistently rapid as in reading.
- In lessons where there is a closer match between learning information, teaching and timely support, pupils making slower progress are helped to catch up. For example, in one lesson a group of pupils were effectively supported by an adult to generate ideas, use vocabulary packs and then write from the view point of an animal.
- The few pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium across the school make the same progress as their classmates. Their average point scores as measured in national assessments are broadly in line with their peers. In the last Year 6 there were no pupils eligible for the pupil premium.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are well supported by teaching assistants within the classroom to access learning. Overall, these pupils make good progress from their starting points.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching has improved within the last two years, ensuring pupils achieve well. This is due to the expectation of excellence from the leadership team and the examples they set. There are robust systems for the checking teaching and effective professional development of teachers to help them improve.
- Pupils typically engage well in their learning because teachers have a good knowledge of the subjects they are teaching. Teachers take care to provide interesting and unusual challenges such as designing a vehicle that can transport an egg without breaking it. However, in a few lessons, teachers' questioning does not always deepen pupils' understanding of concepts, such as the forces required to transport the egg, or build in enough challenge so that pupils' learning is always extended. This means that some pupils do not always make as much progress as they could and move on more quickly in their learning.
- In lessons where pupils make the best progress, teachers check on and reinforce learning. They use technology to share models of good learning and targeted questions that strengthen or check out pupils' skills and understanding. This was seen in a mathematics lesson where pupils were asked to translate information they had generated from a Venn diagram into a bar graph.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work is typically detailed and consistent. Their work books show that they understand the learning and helpful comments that tell pupils what they have done well and next steps in how to proceed. Pupils are given time to read and respond to their teachers' comments.
- Presentation in books has improved and the new approach to using cursive handwriting is used by all, including the youngest children in the Reception class.

- Teaching assistants are used well both inside and outside the classroom. Their well-developed skills are put to good use to guide, support and help pupils to join in and make good progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils across the school are mature, polite and responsible. Along with staff, governors and parents, they told inspectors that behaviour has improved in the school.
- Behaviour is typically good in lessons that motivate and engage the whole class. Where the pace or challenge of learning slows down, there are occasions when some pupils become distracted. Behaviour for learning is developed through consistently reinforcing the skills and qualities required for successful learning such as collaboration, listening and perseverance. As a result, pupils are increasingly managing their own behaviour.
- Relationships between pupils and pupils and teachers are positive and make a good contribution to the progress pupils make.
- Pupils report that they feel safe in school and through their lessons learn about how to keep themselves safe. Many pupils spoke about learning about what it might feel like to be bullied through watching a theatre production during anti-bullying week. They were also able to identify different types of bullying.
- Attendance is above average and is continuing to rise. This shows that pupils clearly enjoy coming to school. The school's own recording of behaviour incidents is comprehensive and also shows that behaviour has improved.
- Parents and carers report high levels of satisfaction with the behaviour and safety of pupils.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The relentless drive for excellence demonstrated by the executive headteacher and the leadership team means that there have been significant improvements in all aspects of the school's work. There is a consistent drive for the highest outcomes for pupils and in improving the quality of teaching to get there.
- All staff are fully involved in ensuring that the school continues to improve further. Staff are highly motivated and are well supported in developing their own skills and expertise. This happens through a system of teacher performance management, the monitoring of lessons and professional development opportunities provided across the two schools and the academy trust.
- Performance management of all staff, including senior leaders, is closely linked to raising pupils' achievement, improving the quality of teaching and other key school development priorities.
- Systems for checking pupils' progress are robust and help to direct the support and resources that pupils need to make gains in their learning.
- The school's development plans and self-evaluation of its work are accurate, focused and appropriate. These are effectively constructed, reviewed and evaluated by all staff and governors.
- The curriculum makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. An effective feature of the curriculum is that themes and topics run right across the school. This means that all pupils, from the youngest to the eldest, share commonalities in their learning and experiences and demonstrates the progression in skills across the school. Many pupils described the whole-school trip to the Making of Harry Potter as one of the highlights of their learning about film and television. Pupils are excited and enthused by opportunities to experience residential trips such as to the outdoors activities centre; they learn about different faiths and beliefs from visitors and they enter sporting competitions.
- The school has benefitted greatly from becoming part of an academy trust through programmes that improve the quality of teaching and governance. The school meets all statutory safeguarding requirements.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body plays a rigorous role in managing the performance of the headteacher. This is demonstrated through the improvements in pupil outcomes and the quality of teaching. Regular and detailed discussion about the performance of all pupils and the quality of teaching takes place and is supported by the headteacher’s report to governors. Governors are aware that very few pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding and that any additional funding is spent on building teaching resources that have resulted in the improving outcomes for all pupils. They understand about the management of teachers’ performance and how it must be used to improve the quality of teaching.

The governing body visits the school regularly and some governors run clubs for pupils. Their involvement is evidenced by notes of visits and minutes of meetings. They have a close working relationship with staff, a good understanding of the work of the school, of pupils’ performance and of the school’s finances. Governors also undertake and seek training opportunities, such as working strategically as governors and asking questions of data.

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	137529
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	406675

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	100
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephanie Atkins
Headteacher	Sheila Todd
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01233 770316
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