

Palace Wood Primary School

Talbot Road, Allington, Maidstone ME16 0HB

Inspection dates 21–22 March 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Pupils' progress in Years 1 and 2 is not yet good because the teaching and planning of suitably challenging work, particularly in mathematics, is not effective enough.
- Typically, teaching and achievement in Years 3 to 6 are inconsistent and do not enable pupils to attain consistently above-average standards.
- Teachers' expectations of the quality and quantity of pupils' written work are not high enough.
- There is not enough focus on the teaching of science. Older pupils' skills in reading do not improve quickly enough.
- Although some aspects of evaluating pupils' progress are good, the marking of their work does not always indicate what they need to do to improve.
- Senior and middle leaders' checks on the quality of teaching are not always rigorous enough and there is not always sufficient urgency in dealing with weaker teaching.
- Senior leaders are not efficient enough in extracting simple, crucial messages from the data they collect so that they are sometimes slow to respond to any dips in achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- Children make good progress in Reception because teaching is good.
- There is some upward trend in standards at Year 6.
- The proportion of good or better teaching in Years 3 and 4 is higher than elsewhere in the school and this is reflected in pupils' improving progress.
- In 2012, the attainment of Year 6 pupils eligible for extra support with government funding was close to that of other pupils.
- Pupils enjoy school and behave well. They feel safe and their attitudes to learning are good. Attendance is above average.
- Senior leaders have a clear view about the further improvements needed.
- Governance has improved considerably. Governors are determined to hold school leaders to account for ensuring that pupils' achievement improves at a much faster rate.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 20 lessons, of which three were seen together with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, the school's phase and senior leaders, and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 93 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). They also considered the school's own recent survey, reflecting the views of around 140 families.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of school documentation, including: records of school checks on the quality of teaching, the school improvement plan, records relating to behaviour, attendance, safeguarding, and pupils' progress. They also looked closely at pupils' written work and listened to pupils reading.

Inspection team

George Logan, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Helen Howard

Additional inspector

Lyn Riley

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Palace Wood Primary School is a larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The great majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported by school action is well below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils eligible for free school meals, those in the care of a local authority and those from forces families) is well below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school hosts an on-site private nursery school, a breakfast club and an after-school club. All of these are registered, managed and inspected separately.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of teaching across the school so that a higher proportion is good or outstanding, by:
 - ensuring that all lessons provide a higher level of challenge, are briskly paced and engage pupils' interest
 - raising staff skills and confidence in the teaching of mathematics
 - establishing higher expectations of the quality and volume of pupils' written work
 - ensuring that planning identifies appropriate tasks, based on accurate assessments of what pupils already know, understand and can do
 - ensuring that the marking of pupils' work provides them with clear guidance as to the next steps in their learning and that pupils have opportunities to respond to the guidance provided.
- Strengthen the consistency of good achievement and raise standards across the school, particularly for higher-attaining pupils, by ensuring that:
 - pupils make more rapid progress, especially in mathematics, leading to consistently higher standards, particularly by the end of Year 2
 - pupils have access to quality teaching and good opportunities for learning, particularly in science
 - more opportunities are developed for older pupils to be heard read aloud.
- Improve the leadership and management of the school by:
 - continuing to strengthen the capacity of the current leadership team
 - ensuring greater rigour in the checking and improvement of teaching and school outcomes
 - tackling remaining underperformance, particularly in teaching, with greater urgency
 - ensuring more streamlined and efficient analysis of data so that whole-school and group trends are more readily apparent.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Attainment by the end of Year 2 is broadly average, although with some variation between years. The proportion of good teaching in Years 1 and 2 is not sufficient to ensure that achievement is any higher. Pupils' work confirms that progress, although broadly as expected, is not good, particularly in mathematics and science, where recorded work is relatively limited.
- Effective teaching and higher expectations recently ensure that that progress accelerates in Years 3 and 4. However, while there has been some rise in attainment by Year 6, standards continue to be variable, largely because of inconsistencies in teaching over time. At times, too little written work is produced and its quality is variable, even between parallel classes. However, standards by the end of Year 6 are on track to be slightly above average in 2013, following a dip in 2012.
- While attainment in reading is broadly average, progress in reading requires improvement. Although outcomes are expected to be higher in 2013, not enough pupils, typically, make accelerated progress. Early Years Foundation Stage children receive a systematic grounding in the linking of sounds and letters (phonics) and make good progress in developing their reading skills. Older pupils do not build upon this good start sufficiently. Those with gaps in their phonics knowledge are not heard to read aloud often enough.
- Children enter Reception with skill levels at least in line with those found nationally. They make good progress through effective teaching and a well-judged curriculum. Standards on leaving Reception are now above those expected.
- In 2012, the attainment of Year 2 pupils known to be eligible for free school meals (pupil premium) was close to that of other pupils. The attainment of eligible Year 6 pupils was less than one term behind that of other pupils in English and mathematics as measured by their average point scores in national tests. This continues to be the broad pattern of achievement. Additional funding is appropriately targeted.
- The achievement of the relatively few disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is similar to that of the majority of pupils in the school.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because there is insufficient good or better teaching. Though improved, learning remains inconsistent. Too often, lessons lack challenge and pace, so that pupils' enthusiasm is not built upon sufficiently, especially in Years 1 and 2. Expectations of the quality and quantity of pupils' recorded work are not high enough.
- Recent actions, such as the deployment of specialist external support for literacy, have contributed to the beginnings of a trend of improvement. However, the teaching of mathematics remains less consistent. Several key improvements around planning and classroom display have been initiated recently.
- The use of assessment information to plan future lessons is inconsistent, so that the work does not always closely match pupils' abilities. Although there is better practice for older pupils, this is a particular issue in Years 1 and 2.
- The achievement of pupils eligible for free school meals reflects the whole-school trend of achievement. Teachers are now more aware of their needs, so ensuring that the gap with their peers continues to narrow.
- The checking and supporting of pupils' progress are inconsistent. Some older pupils know what level they are working at. Individual targets in writing and mathematics are generally well established, enabling pupils to focus their efforts to improve. The marking of work sometimes identifies what they need to do next but this is only a recent development. However, there are few opportunities for pupils to respond to teachers' marking.
- Better teaching in Years 3 and 4 has ensured that progress is mostly good. In an outstanding

English lesson on persuasive writing in Year 4, pupils drafted letters to persuade the headteacher to allow the creation of a tyre garden. Pupils were engaged and challenged, the task was meaningful and the pace of learning was brisk.

- Recent improvements in support, together with a more rigorous review of the school's procedures, are driving better progress for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Planning now defines the deployment and expected impact of additional staff.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' behaviour is almost always good. Pupils are sociable and enthusiastic. In general, pupils' response reflects the quality of teaching. When lessons lack challenge, pupils tend, unobtrusively, to disengage and to seek out social opportunities. Occasionally, in the infant lunch hall, noise levels increase markedly. However, most parents and carers who expressed a view tend to agree with inspectors that behaviour is good.
- Effective procedures exist to tackle the rare instances of poor behaviour. Staff mostly manage behaviour well. There have been no recent exclusions and few recent racist incidents.
- Pupils, themselves, are positive about behaviour and safety. They believe that adults are responsive to their concerns and that they will resolve any difficulties.
- Pupils understand that bullying may take different forms, for example, in relation to ethnicity or physical characteristics. They understand the risks presented by social networking sites. There are no recent recorded instances of bullying. As one pupil said: 'We are a naturally anti-bullying school.' The school encourages pupils to undertake responsibilities, such as the 'Helping Hands' playground assistants.
- Pupils have a good awareness of risk, including issues relating to road safety and the internet, and know how to ensure their safety in different circumstances.
- Attendance, although slightly lower this year, is above average. The school takes a firm line on attendance, working hard with pupils and families. Pupils arrive punctually.

The leadership and management require improvement

- Although there have been some improvements to the quality of teaching and improved progress in Years 3 and 4, all pupils are not yet achieving at a rate appropriate to their level of ability. While senior leaders have driven some improvement, and there are emerging strengths in middle leadership and governance, so enhancing the school's ability to make more rapid improvement, the pace of change has, so far, been relatively slow.
- The recently established middle leadership team is committed to improvement, despite some inexperience and inconsistencies in the rigour of checks they make on teaching and pupils' work. The leadership of Early Years Foundation Stage and of provision for special educational needs is good.
- More rigorous procedures for checking and improving the performance of teachers have been implemented and decisions about pay rises are now linked to pupils' progress. However, there are still staff on enhanced salaries whose impact on progress is insufficient. Overall, the analysis of teaching, although improved, is not yet rigorous enough.
- School leaders have refined the use of pupil premium funding. This funding subsidises basic skills support for literacy and numeracy, small-group work to enhance pupils' attitudes to school and some social development initiatives. However, the evaluation of the impact of this funding has only recently focused sufficiently on accelerating pupils' progress.
- The school amasses large amounts of data on pupils' performance. However, analyses are not always sufficiently focused on broad trends, thereby missing the important messages, 'the bigger picture', particularly relating to underperformance.

- Monitoring and evaluation is of variable quality. Systems are now in place and school leaders make regular checks on the quality of planning and teaching. Monitoring is not always, however, rigorous or analytical enough to identify exactly what needs to be done or in setting precise time limits for when improvements should be in place.
 - A few weaker features in the procedures for checking aspects of health and safety practices were pointed out to senior leaders. The school already has this matter well in hand.
 - External support from the local authority in the current year has been good. Staff recognise that, while some changes have been promoted internally, other recent developments have been initiated through external support.
 - The school provides an appropriate range of subjects and activities, particularly in supporting improved skills in literacy and numeracy, with a current focus on writing. A range of themes and topics engages pupils' interest adequately, although these are not always explored in any depth. The school is developing opportunities to make learning more meaningful. The depth of challenge in science is limited. A good range of out-of-school activities enhances pupils' experience.
 - Provision for pupils' social and moral development is strong. Spiritual development is less well established. Pupils have some opportunities to engage with other cultures. Links with parents are secure, although a minority of parents are not entirely happy with all aspects of the school's work.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance has improved considerably, under its current leadership. Governors have undertaken extensive training, understand their role and have a good awareness of the school's effectiveness. They know the detail of pupils' progress and outcomes and are determined not to tolerate underperformance. They analyse areas of weakness and evaluate, first hand, the effectiveness of decisions made. They now rigorously challenge the school on the impact of teaching on the pupils' performance, comparing outcomes to national data on progress and attainment. They recognise the need to ensure equality of opportunity, to tackle discrimination and to foster good relationships. They ensure that pay and promotion are, now, firmly linked to teachers' effectiveness and performance management. They recognise that some teachers currently paid on higher salary scales are not, despite general improvements, consistently meeting the standards expected. They manage the budget well and contribute to decisions about the use of pupil premium funding to close gaps in pupils' achievement. They aim to ensure that this provides still better value, and track the impact of the funding closely. Governors also ensure, along with senior leaders, that safeguarding arrangements meet national requirements.
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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	135106
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	406586

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	395
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Perks
Headteacher	Denise White
Date of previous school inspection	3 November 2010
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