

Lower Halstow Primary School

School Lane, Lower Halstow, Sittingbourne, ME9 7ES

Inspection dates 16–17 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Progress is too variable across the school and not enough pupils make the progress of which they are capable.
- The achievement of groups of pupils receiving additional support, including those with special educational needs and those in receipt of the pupil premium, is uneven across different year groups. The school has used a range of ways to support these pupils, but has not regularly checked which types of support help pupils make the most progress.
- Teachers do not always identify clearly enough what pupils need to do next in order to consolidate and improve their learning.
- In some classes, pupils do not have enough regular opportunities to respond to teachers' marking in ways that are appropriate for their age.
- Although teachers plan their lessons in detail, they do not always link their planning closely enough to the information they have on the attainment and progress of individual pupils to ensure that the work set extends and challenges the abilities of all pupils.
- School improvement planning needs to be more sharply focused, with clear goals, milestones and success criteria so that school leaders, including governors, know how effective their actions are.

The school has the following strengths

- Attitudes to learning are good and often exemplary, because staff have positive relationships with pupils and a consistent approach to behaviour management.
- Pupils are polite, friendly and feel safe at school.
- Pupils' achievement in reading is improving rapidly. Effective phonics teaching has meant all pupils are confident to tackle unfamiliar words.
- Pupils enjoy their learning. They have many opportunities to work together collaboratively and teachers plan interesting, imaginative activities.
- Parents are highly supportive of the work of the school and are proud of the caring ethos which the school fosters so effectively.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and exciting and provides many opportunities for active first-hand learning.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out by one inspector. She observed ten lessons or part lessons and carried out a number of 'drop in' sessions to observe the teaching of phonics (the linking of letters and sounds). Two lessons were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspector held meetings with school staff, members of the Governing Body, including the Chair, a representative from the local authority and groups of pupils. She also listened to pupils read and observed behaviour at playtimes and lunchtime.
- The inspector studied a range of documentation, including policies and records of behaviour, safeguarding arrangements, records of pupils' attainment and progress, the school's monitoring and planning documentation, minutes of governing body meetings and information related to the performance and salary progression of staff.
- During the inspection, 16 responses to Parent View were taken into account, as well as ten responses to questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Sue Quirk, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Lower Halstow is smaller than the average-sized primary school. Since the last inspection, it has entered into a federation with another local primary school. The headteacher is executive headteacher of both schools.
- The proportion of pupils identified with special educational needs through school action is higher than average. The proportion with more severe special needs supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is just above average.
- Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. A small number are of Gypsy/Roma heritage.
- Approximately one sixth of pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children who are looked after by the local authority and the children of service families). This is lower than average. There are currently no children of service families at the school.
- 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?

- Ensure that teaching is targeted more precisely at individuals and groups of pupils so that more pupils make rapid progress by:
 - making better use of pupils' progress information to ensure that work extends and challenges the abilities of all pupils
 - regularly making clear pupils' next steps for learning, through verbal feedback and marking
 - giving pupils more regular and frequent opportunities to respond to feedback, in ways that are appropriate for their age.
- Increase the proportions of pupils making more than the expected rates of progress by:
 - regularly checking the progress of all pupils receiving additional help and support
 - ensuring that additional funding to support the learning of pupils in receipt of the pupil premium is effectively targeted and closely checked so that they make more rapid progress.
- Sharpen the effectiveness of leaders and managers by:
 - including more precise goals, milestones and success measures in the school improvement plan so these can be used to carefully check the impact of actions taken
 - ensuring that checks on the quality of teaching are closely linked to pupils' progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Progress is too variable across the school and in the past has not been good enough. In the 2011 and 2012 Key Stage 2 national tests, not enough pupils made accelerated progress across the school and attained the standards of which they were capable, especially in English.
- The learning and progress of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs have been uneven because, until recently, leaders and managers did not regularly check which types of support and intervention were most effective. Teachers are now making sure the extra help pupils receive is effective in helping them make faster progress, and in some classes they are making better progress than other pupils, especially in reading and writing.
- Recent improvements to the quality of teaching mean that gaps in attainment between different groups are closing. Over recent years, there has been a rising trend in attainment at the end of Key Stage 1, and results in mathematics in the end of Key Stage 2 assessments in 2012 were above national averages.
- The majority of children enter the school with skills and abilities slightly lower than expected for their age, especially in communication and language development. They make variable rates of progress across the different areas of learning and across Key Stages 1 and 2 and in 2012, pupils left the school with attainment that was below average in English and just above in mathematics.
- The progress of pupils in receipt of the pupil premium is variable across different year groups. The school has used the additional funding to support these pupils in a range of ways, including individual tuition, but has only recently begun to regularly check which type of support helps pupils make the most progress. In the 2012 national tests, the very small proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding, because they were entitled to free school meals, were two national curriculum levels behind their peers in English and one national curriculum level behind in mathematics, as measured by average points scores. There were no pupils in that cohort looked after by the local authority or from service families. Rates of progress for pupils eligible for pupil premium funding currently in the school are improving rapidly across the school and the gap between their attainment and that of their peers is closing because there are much tighter checks on how well they are doing.
- The school fosters equality of opportunity well for the small group of Gypsy/Roma pupils and works well with the traveller community to support their well-being, including through promoting regular attendance. Although progress, as with White British pupils, has been variable, most leave the school with established basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics and attainment at least in line with that of similar pupils nationally.
- Improvements to the quality of teaching have meant that groups of pupils are making more rapid progress in all subjects across the school. This was demonstrated in a Year 4/5 lesson where pupils worked well together, successfully using their knowledge of multiplication and division, as they solved problems, such as how much 50 gold coins would cost when they knew the cost of six.
- Although results of the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2012 were low, the teaching of phonics is now embedded in the school and pupils are able to apply their knowledge well to unfamiliar words. The school has put in place a number of measures to improve the teaching of reading and, throughout the school, pupils' achievement in reading is improving rapidly.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching over time has not been targeted precisely enough to ensure that all pupils make the rates of progress of which they are capable. More effective teaching this year is supporting more rapid and consistent progress and rising attainment.
- Although teachers plan their lessons in detail, they do not always link their planning closely

enough to the information they have on the attainment and progress of individual pupils to ensure that the work set extends and challenges the abilities of all pupils.

- Teachers mark work regularly and conscientiously but do not always identify clearly enough what pupils need to do next in order to consolidate and improve their learning. Written comments in books for the youngest children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are not helpful to most children. The school has identified that older pupils do not consistently respond to marking in books and has recently put systems in place to ensure this happens.
- Teaching assistants are generally deployed well to ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils. They provide appropriate targeted support for individuals and groups.
- Teachers effectively foster good relationships with their pupils, who were overwhelmingly positive about their enjoyment of lessons and the fun they have. This was clearly demonstrated in a Year 5/6 lesson, where the teacher's excellent rapport with the class meant all pupils were totally absorbed in drafting a paragraph on what could be in the silver treasure box. One pupil wrote: 'Silence! The gleaming silver box sparkled like diamonds. The glistening light blinded me.'
- The teaching of reading is now a strength of the school. Regular guided reading sessions are well planned to challenge and stretch different ability groups. Younger pupils are developing effective strategies for tackling unfamiliar words because phonics teaching is well matched to pupils' abilities.
- Pupils have many opportunities to work together collaboratively and check each other's work for mistakes. Teachers plan interesting imaginative activities and are becoming increasingly skilled at checking how well pupils understand their work and, where necessary, they adapt their plans to take pupils' responses into account.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Attitudes to learning are good and often exemplary, because most staff have positive relationships with pupils and a consistent approach to behaviour management. Pupils generally behave well with all adults, not just their own teachers.
- Pupils are polite, friendly and keen to learn. They say they feel safe in school and that the adults in school can be relied upon to deal with any issues. They feel behaviour is generally good. All staff who responded to the questionnaire, and most parents and carers who gave their views, believe that behaviour is good.
- Pupils are particularly appreciative of the school's work to keep them safe. One boy said, 'I love being at school, it's just like being at home – except you have to do a load of work in the middle of the day!'
- The school keeps a log of behavioural incidents and how they are resolved. These are relatively few in number. The school tackles discrimination effectively. Racist incidents, inappropriate behaviour and disruption of lessons are all rare. The school makes good provision for pupils of different cultural heritages, especially those from Gypsy/Roma Traveller backgrounds.
- Pupils know that bullying may take different forms, such as internet bullying or name-calling based on physical differences. Pupils say instances of bullying, including prejudice-based bullying, are rare and they know adults will support them.
- Attendance has improved steadily and is now above average. Most pupils arrive punctually. The school works tirelessly to raise the attendance levels of a few pupils whose attendance is erratic. There have been no exclusions in recent years.

The leadership and management require improvement

- The executive headteacher and her senior leadership team know they are on a journey of improvement and that systems for leading and managing the two schools in the federation are

still being embedded.

- Although leaders and managers know what needs to be done to improve achievement, school improvement planning needs to be more sharply focused with clear goals, milestones and success criteria so that school leaders, including governors, know how effective their actions are.
- Regular checking of the quality of teaching and holding teachers to account for the rates of progress of pupils in their class has led to improvements in planning, teachers' questioning, levels of pupil engagement and the effective promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across the curriculum. Leaders now need to make sure that observations of teaching are firmly linked to the progress of individuals and groups of pupils.
- Improving trends in attainment at Key Stage 1, in achievement in reading, phonics and mathematics and in the quality of teaching are evidence of the school's capacity for further improvement.
- The curriculum provides many opportunities for active first-hand learning. A visit to the tunnels under Dover Castle helped pupils understand what life was like during the Second World War. There are now many more opportunities for pupils' cultural development, which is an improvement since the last inspection.
- Parents are highly supportive of the work of the school and are proud of the caring ethos which the school fosters so effectively.
- The local authority has confidence in the leadership of the school and has provided minimal support.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body oversees the two schools in the federation and was established in September 2012, so members are relatively new to the role of governance of more than one school. They have a wide range of appropriate skills and expertise. They have undertaken a range of training, including on appraisal and the school's performance, to make sure their knowledge is fully up to date. They make regular visits to the school to see particular aspects of the school's work for themselves. They are well informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses and its performance in relation to national data.
 - Governors have approved the use of pupil premium funding to provide additional staffing and a range of interventions to support pupils' social and academic development. However, they have not yet analysed the impact of these interventions to see which are most effective. Governors are well informed about the school's performance management systems and will not authorise any movement up the salary scale unless there is clear evidence of consistently good teaching and an impact on rates of progress. They ensure that all statutory requirements in relation to health, safety and staff vetting are carried out conscientiously.
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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	118341
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	412204

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	132
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Marshall
Headteacher	Cathy Walker
Date of previous school inspection	24–25 March 2010
Telephone number	01795 842344
Fax number	01795 842552
Email address	headteacher@lower-halstow.kent.sch.uk

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