

Platts Heath Primary School

Headcorn Road, Maidstone, ME17 2NH

Inspection dates 12–13 June 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		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Over time, variations in the quality of teaching have resulted in pupils making uneven progress. Some pupils have not made the progress they should, particularly in writing.
- Improvements in the quality of teaching have not been in place for long enough to ensure that pupils achieve well.
- Teachers' questioning is not always used to check pupils' understanding beyond those who regularly put up their hands.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to apply writing skills in different subjects.
- Occasionally a few pupils lose concentration when activities are not engaging, particularly when working without an adult.
- In the Reception outdoor area, opportunities are missed for children to apply what they have learnt and engage in independent activities.
- While there is some good practice, marking does not always give pupils guidance about what they can do to improve their work.

The school has the following strengths

- Strong leadership and a whole-school commitment to improvement have led to a rapid improvement in the quality of teaching. As a result, pupils' progress is accelerating.
- A successful whole-school drive to improve achievement in reading means that pupils make good progress in this aspect of literacy.
- Pupils enjoy school and behave well. They feel safe and well looked after. Pupils of different ages get on very well together.
- Governors have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and of further improvements needed.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed six lessons, including three lesson observations with the headteacher.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, a group of governors, a representative from the local authority, senior leaders, staff and pupils.
- The inspector took account of 26 responses to the on-line Parent View survey in addition to the results of a school questionnaire.
- The inspector observed the school's work and analysed a range of documents and policies, including the school improvement plan, information about pupils' progress, attendance records, safeguarding documents and a sample of pupils' work.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below the national average. (Pupil premium is additional funding provided by the government to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children who are looked after by the local authority and the children of service families).
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- Most pupils are White British.
- Pupils are taught in mixed age classes from Reception to Year 6. There is a Reception and Year 1 class, a Years 2 and 3 class, and a Years 4, 5 and 6 class.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement, particularly in writing, by embedding improvements in teaching and ensuring that teaching is consistently good or better by:
 - extending teachers' use of questioning to ensure that they check pupils' understanding beyond those who regularly put their hands up during lessons
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills in different subjects
 - ensuring that activities are engaging and stimulating
 - increasing the use of the Reception outdoor area so that children have more opportunities to follow their own interests and engage in a wide range of activities that promote their development across all areas of learning
 - ensuring that marking regularly includes comments about what pupils need to do next to move their learning forward.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because pupils' progress over time has been uneven between classes, year groups and subjects. This has been due to variations in the quality of teaching across the school.
- A legacy of weak teaching means that there are gaps in some pupils' knowledge and understanding. Tailored support for individual pupils is successfully addressing these gaps.
- Pupils' progress is accelerating, particularly in Years 4, 5 and 6, as a result of improved teaching. Teachers make better use of assessment information to ensure that pupils' needs are met, and focused teaching groups are helping those previously falling behind to catch up.
- Pupils make good progress in reading and mathematics. They make slower progress in writing. This is because opportunities are missed for pupils to apply writing skills in different subjects.
- The school is committed to ensuring that all pupils have equal opportunities to achieve well. An effective special needs leader and a competent team of teaching assistants provide tailored support to those pupils who need extra help. As a result, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make similar progress to other pupils in the school.
- Children enter the school with the skills and knowledge expected for their age. They make good progress in Reception, particularly in early writing and mathematical skills, and in their personal development.
- Variations in the size of cohorts in this small village school mean that comparison with national information about pupils' achievement can be misleading. For example, in 2012 there were just two pupils in Year 6, while the current Year 6 consists of eight pupils. As a result, attainment at the end of Year 6, in comparison with the national picture, fluctuates from year to year.
- Typically, levels of attainment at the end of Year 2 are below average, and above average at the end of Year 6.
- A successful whole-school focus on the teaching of reading means that pupils make good progress in this subject and achieve well. Pupils of different abilities told the inspector that they enjoy reading, and some of the youngest pupils in the school were able to talk about their favourite types of book.
- In 2012, results of the Year 1 phonics screening check were below the national average. The school has taken effective steps to tackle these weaknesses, introducing a greater focus on the teaching of the link between letters and sounds (phonics) across the school.
- School information indicates that the very small number of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals are making similar progress to their peers. Recently, their attainment by Year 6 meant they were the equivalent of four terms behind other pupils in the school in mathematics and six terms behind in English but this gap is closing as a result of effective additional support.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Variations in the quality of teaching over time have resulted in pupils making uneven progress as they move through the school.
- At times, teachers' questioning of pupils is limited to those pupils who have their hands up so that the understanding of other pupils in the class is not fully explored. Occasionally, activities do not always engage and excite pupils. In these lessons, a few pupils lose concentration, particularly when working without adult support, and their progress slows.
- In the Reception/Year 1 class, use of the outdoor area to support learning is in its early stages due, in part, to the challenges presented by the school building. As a result, opportunities are missed to develop pupils' independence and to provide more opportunities for pupils to apply what they have learnt.

- Pupils' work is regularly marked and pupils told the inspector that they find marking helps them to understand what they have done well. However, marking does not always include comments to guide pupils' next steps in their learning.
- Recent improvements in teaching mean that teaching is now usually good and pupils' progress is accelerating. Effective teaching is characterised by confident subject knowledge and well-paced and interesting lessons so that pupils are motivated to find out more and to do well. For example, pupils in the Reception/Year 1 class enthusiastically discussed which material they should use to wrap up Humpty Dumpty to protect his shell. They worked together extremely well to test their ideas.
- Teachers regularly use information about pupils' progress to ensure that planned learning meets individual needs. Increased expectations of pupils' behaviour and learning mean that pupils of different abilities are given work which is appropriately challenging. For example, in a Years 4, 5 and 6 class, pupils of all abilities relished the level of challenge provided by a number problem and all were actively involved.
- Teaching assistants work calmly and purposefully with individual pupils and groups, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. As a result, these pupils usually make good progress, particularly in the development of basic mathematical and literacy skills.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils are polite and considerate and show respect for others. Pupils' behaviour is good in lessons, during playtimes and when moving around the school. The large majority of parents who completed the Parent View survey agree with this view.
 - Relationships between pupils of different ages are a particular strength in the school and older pupils enjoy caring for the younger pupils. For example, during the inspection, a pupil in Year 6 very sensitively supported a younger pupil with his reading.
 - Attendance levels have improved and are above average. This reflects pupils' interest in learning and their enjoyment of being with their friends.
 - Pupils have a good understanding of different types of bullying. They know what to do if they have any concerns and are confident that adults will help. A small minority of parents who completed Parent View feel that bullying is not dealt with effectively by the school. Inspection evidence, including a scrutiny of school records, show that incidents of bullying are rare and that the school responds appropriately when they occur.
 - Pupils have a sensible view of the part they can play in keeping themselves safe. For example, they know about cyber-bullying and the risk posed by opening emails from unknown senders. Pupils told the inspector that they feel very safe in school, and most parents who completed Parent View agree.
 - The school will not tolerate discrimination of any kind. Pupils told the inspector that racist incidents are rare and this view is supported by school records. There have been no racist incidents in the past three years.
 - Behaviour is not yet outstanding because a few pupils find it difficult to behave appropriately at all times and sometimes lose concentration during lessons.
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The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher gives clear, caring and positive direction to the work of the school and has effectively steered the school through a period of considerable change.
- At the time of the last inspection, relationships between staff were reported to be fragile and this was impeding improvement rates. Since his appointment, the headteacher has established a cohesive school community. The school has a very friendly and positive ethos and staff morale is high.
- High expectations and effective teamwork are driving improvement strongly. There is a shared determination to build on strengths and to raise achievement further. As a result, the school is well placed to make further headway.
- An element of weaker teaching has been eradicated and two thirds of the teaching staff has changed. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved and school information indicates that pupils' progress is accelerating.
- Leaders at all levels are sharply focused on improving pupils' learning. They are regularly involved in meetings to discuss information about pupils' progress and to check for any pupils who may be falling behind. This has enabled the school to provide well-focused support for those pupils who need extra help.
- School leaders have secured improvements to assessment systems. This means that they and class teachers have an accurate picture of pupils' needs and are able to build more confidently and robustly on pupils' prior learning, so that no time is lost in moving their learning forward.
- The curriculum effectively contributes to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and spiritual development. During the inspection, for example, pupils talked with interest and maturity about Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela and their contributions to human rights.
- Improvements to the school environment mean that good use is made of the space available and pupils feel that their work is valued. For example, an attractive library area has been created and is regularly used by pupils, while classrooms are bright and stimulating.
- The local authority has played a valuable role in the school's improvement. Visits to the school, including lesson observations with the headteacher, have successfully contributed to the identification of development priorities.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a good overview of the school's performance and how this compares to other schools nationally, including pupils' achievement. Governors have taken effective action to ensure that the budget is secure and provide robust checks to ensure that funds are used appropriately to benefit the pupils. For example, they know how pupil premium funding is used to provide tailored support for those pupils who are eligible and they keep a close eye on how well this is helping pupils to learn. Governors have first-hand knowledge of the quality of teaching because they are regularly involved in visits to the school and well informed by the headteacher. They know how pay is used to reward and support staff performance. Safeguarding arrangements are systematic and robust and meet statutory requirements.

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	118295
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	401738

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	64
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Debbie Henderson
Headteacher	Piers Ancomb
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2010
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