

Sutton Valence Primary School

North Street, Sutton Valence, Maidstone, Kent ME17 3HT

Inspection dates 19–20 September 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		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Pupils' achievement across the school is uneven in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Lower-attaining pupils in Key Stage 1 do not apply their knowledge of phonics (knowledge of letters and their sounds) well enough and they read hesitantly.
- Spelling, punctuation and untidy handwriting mar the quality of some pupils' written work.
- Not enough pupils are attaining higher levels in mathematics.
- Children in Reception are not consistently given challenging learning opportunities when learning through play.
- Teachers do not always make the best use of time in lessons to drive pupils' learning forward. Pupils are inconsistently challenged.
- The pace of improvement since the previous inspection has not been fast enough.
- The checking and development of teaching over time has not been effective in ensuring pupils make good progress.
- The new acting headteachers have not yet had time to have had an impact on teaching or pupils' progress. The role of middle leaders is not sufficiently developed.

The school has the following strengths:

- Year 6 pupils' attainment rose to above average for the last academic year.
- Pupils' attendance is good. Pupils are keen to learn and behave well. They feel entirely safe and enjoy school.
- Governors provide good challenge for school leaders and hold them to account for the school's performance.
- The acting headteachers and senior leaders understand what improvements are needed and have started to take firm and effective action.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 16 lessons, including nine which were joint observations with the acting headteachers, and listened to a sample of pupils reading from Years 1 and 2.
- Inspectors held discussions with pupils, looked at a range of their work and examined the school's data on attainment and progress.
- Meetings were held with representatives of the governing body, senior leaders and teachers and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors considered the 29 responses to the online Parent View survey and spoke to a few parents and carers.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including plans for improvement, safeguarding arrangements, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and records of school leaders' observations of teaching.

Inspection team

Eileen Chadwick, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Peter Thrussell

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Sutton Valence Primary School is average in size compared with most primary schools.
- While most pupils are White British, an average proportion are from minority ethnic backgrounds with the largest group, at 4%, of Gypsy/Roma heritage. A few pupils are at early stages of learning English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding (additional funding provided for looked after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children from service families) is below average. Currently, there are no children from service families.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The substantive headteacher left in July 2013. Since then, two acting headteachers have led the school for four days each week. The deputy headteacher currently manages the school one day each week.
- The school provides a daily breakfast club for pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring teachers teach English and mathematics lessons at the right level of difficulty so all pupils make consistently good progress
 - making the most effective use of time during lessons including more opportunities for pupils to combine sounds into words during phonics lessons
 - providing greater levels of challenge in Reception, especially during independent learning, role play, reading, writing and mathematics.
- Raise achievement and accelerate progress by:
 - accelerating the progress of boys in Key Stage 2 in reading and improving pupils' spelling, punctuation and handwriting
 - raising the proportions of pupils reaching higher levels in mathematics in Key Stages 1 and 2
 - ensuring lower attaining pupils practise their sounds before reading their books and are heard to read more regularly, and that reading records show parents and carers their children's phonics targets.
 - raising the attainment of pupils in receipt of the pupil premium in Key Stage 1.
- Improve the leadership of teaching by:
 - evaluating more rigorously, when monitoring lessons, the impact of teaching on the learning of different groups of pupils and quickly addressing any weaknesses
 - ensuring middle leaders develop their roles so they play a full part in improving English and mathematics teaching across the whole school
 - managing teaching assistants more effectively and, where necessary, providing training to improve the support they give.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Children enter Reception with knowledge and skills which are generally typical of those for their age. They make uneven progress in Reception and across the rest of the school.
- In Reception, children settle quickly. They learn well when taught early reading and phonics skills in large groups but their progress slows when they play and learn independently. Attainment at the end of Reception is only average because activities that children are allowed to choose are insufficiently challenging, especially for reading, writing and mathematics and for role play.
- Attainment in Year 2 has been only broadly average over time, including in reading. In mathematics, too few reach higher levels than they should.
- National phonics checks show that Year 1 pupils' attainment improved considerably in the previous academic year and that underachieving Year 2 pupils made up lost ground when they were in Year 1. Systems for teaching phonics have improved but pupils' progress is too uneven because teachers do not consistently give pupils enough oral and written opportunities to combine letter sounds when reading and writing words.
- In Key Stage 1, reading books are occasionally too hard for lower-attaining pupils and pupils are not given enough opportunities to practise their sounds before reading to an adult. This causes lower-attaining pupils to read hesitantly. Lower-attaining pupils' progress is also held back because they do not read to an adult frequently enough.
- Pupils' home-school reading records do not include sufficient reading targets and information about the key sounds and letters they should know, so parents and carers are limited in being able to help their children.
- Year 6 pupils' attainment in national tests has been average in reading, writing and mathematics over the past three years. The national results in 2013 show an improvement to above average standards overall. However, pupils' achievement is too variable and too few boys make the progress they should in reading.
- Pupils' achievement in Key Stage 2 continues to be uneven. In the current Year 6, fewer pupils are working at higher levels in mathematics than should because they have not been consistently challenged in Key Stage 2. Pupils write eagerly for different purposes using interesting vocabulary and well-constructed sentences. However, at all levels, handwriting, spelling and punctuation weaknesses for some pupils prevent standards rising more quickly.
- Small-group teaching speeds up the progress of disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic groups, including Travellers and those who speak English as an additional language. However, the overall progress of these groups is similar to that of their peers as it is uneven due to inconsistencies in class teaching across the school.
- Those in receipt of pupil premium funding are currently making progress similar to their peers. In last year's Year 6 tests, pupils' attainment improved to above average and was similar to their peers'. In Key Stage 1, pupils' attainment improved in the last academic year although it was still below their peers', especially in mathematics where they were one year behind.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is not sufficiently strong to promote good progress across the school. There are times in lessons when the pace of learning slows, for example when teachers talk for too long during lesson introductions so limiting the time for pupils to work independently. On other occasions, practical activities at the start of lessons take up too much time or do not involve enough pupils.
- Activities planned to promote learning are not always matched well enough to the needs of different groups of pupils. This happens, for example, during some mathematics lessons when there is insufficient challenge for the most able pupils or the steps are too hard for lower-achieving ones. Some teachers have been slow to make full use of pupils' assessments from the

end of the last academic year and, as a result, pupils repeat too much of their earlier learning.

- Pupils are usually clear about their targets from the last academic year but these have not yet been updated in all classes. This prevents pupils checking their current attainment and progress and taking responsibility for improving their work. Marking is too variable across the school.
- In Reception, children learn well when taught directly in adult-led groups but there is insufficient planning for stimulating, purposeful play, including in literacy and numeracy and for role play. Children's use of activities is not always monitored carefully enough and some resources are worn.
- There are examples of teaching assistants working well with pupils, such as helping to improve their basic number skills or keep them focused on their work. However, their help varies and they do not always have the necessary skills, for example, when supporting small groups of pupils in literacy.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are good and pupils trust the adults who look after them. Teachers manage pupils sensitively and firmly, including those who find it difficult to concentrate. Learning is often made interesting, for example when Year 6 pupils wrote newspaper reports about imaginary sightings of 'The Black Fox' after enjoying good quality literature about foxes.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Pupils behave well and play harmoniously during break and lunchtimes. They are courteous and respectful around the school. They know that discrimination is not tolerated and this helps them to enjoy the very good outdoor facilities where they play together sensibly.

- Pupils enjoy school and attend regularly. They feel safe in school and comment that the new acting headteachers are strict but fair. The very large majority of parents and carers are satisfied with the way the school keeps their children safe and most feel their children are happy at school.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning. In a few lessons they become distracted and are not ready to learn when teachers do not ensure pupils move smartly from working as a whole class to smaller group work. Occasionally pupils lose concentration when teachers talk for too long or become bored when they are insufficiently challenged.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted. Pupils and staff have strong respect for each other regardless of ability, race or religious belief. Pupils are given good opportunities to reflect on good quality literature and the richness of different cultures.
- Pupils have a good understanding of different forms of bullying, such as internet bullying and name calling and say that bullying is very rare. They have confidence in their teachers to sort out any problems. A small minority of parents and carers are not convinced bullying is tackled well enough. Evidence examined by inspectors and discussions with pupils do not support this latter view.
- The school has provided additional support and counselling for individual pupils who have emotional needs and this is helping these pupils to work successfully alongside their classmates.
- The breakfast club provides a happy and safe start to the school day.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because senior leaders have not ensured good teaching and progress over time. While senior leaders have driven some improvements, the pace of improvement has been too slow.
- Nevertheless, there have been some recent improvements in pupils' achievement, for example in phonics in Key Stage 1 and a rise in standards in Key Stage 2. This shows the school has the capacity to improve.
- The experienced acting headteachers have identified the right priorities and already set off on

the right track to bring about quicker improvement. Together with governors, they have strengthened the management of teachers' performance by ensuring pay is more closely linked to the quality of their teaching and introduced more rigorous systems for checking teaching and achievement. Staff have welcomed the clear direction they are now being given.

- Teachers are keen to improve but have been insufficiently guided in the past. School leaders' lesson checks have not been robust enough. They have not clearly identified the impact of teaching on the progress made by different groups of pupils in different subjects. This has led to school leaders and teachers having an overly generous view of the quality of teaching.
- This is recognised by the governing body, which requested a full local authority review of the school's effectiveness during the last academic year. Governors hold senior leaders to account very well.
- The senior team and governors have identified the need to strengthen the leadership of teaching. The acting headteachers' judgements of teaching are accurate. Their judgements of the lessons jointly observed with inspectors fully matched those of inspectors.
- Middle leaders' roles are being reviewed in order to ensure they have a significant impact on teaching and pupils' progress. The acting headteachers and governors acknowledge there is a lack of systems for them to check teaching and assessments rigorously across the school.
- The school has been given medium-level support by the local authority. It values the support it has been given for holding school leaders to account and providing subject training, for example in mathematics.
- The school ethos is inclusive in seeking to promote equality. The broad curriculum contributes to pupils' enjoyment of school and their mature attitudes.
- Good opportunities for sport are strengthened by links with subject specialists from the secondary school. Extra funding for sport has been well allocated for increasing specialist teaching in order to widen pupils' experiences and develop their skills to a higher level.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body, newly formed 18 months ago, is now a feature of strength. Its members have high expectations and governors are very experienced or have been appropriately trained, including in interpreting assessment information. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and hold the school to account through a focused view of performance. They know about the quality of teaching and the need to use performance management systematically to improve this. They are fully involved in setting targets. Governors know exactly how premium monies are being spent and judge the difference this spending and provision are making to pupils' outcomes. Safeguarding requirements are fully met.

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	118314
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	426463

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	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Randa William
Headteacher	Susan Cox
Date of previous school inspection	14 October 2011
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