

Higham Primary School

School Lane, Higham, Rochester, ME3 7JL

Inspection dates 3–4 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils achieve well across the school. Where there are gaps in attainment between different pupils, very good help ensures that pupils catch up with their peers so that they are well prepared for their next stage of school.
- Behaviour is exemplary. Pupils clearly enjoy learning and they try very hard to do their best in lessons. The school is a safe and caring place where respect for one another is evident.
- Attendance is consistently high and reflects pupils' enjoyment of school.
- The headteacher and other leaders work hard and effectively to ensure that teaching is good and improving. Governors understand how well the school is doing and what needs to be done next.
- The curriculum is interesting and provides good opportunities for pupils to work together and practise their skills.
- Since the last inspection the leadership and teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage have improved notably.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not yet outstanding because the excellent marking seen in some books is not yet consistent across all subjects in all classes and so does not yet ensure that all pupils make exceptional progress as they move through the school. Teachers' subject knowledge is not consistently good in all subjects and this means in some lessons progress is not exceptional.
- Leadership and management are not as effective across all subjects as they are in English and mathematics and in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Work remains to be done to ensure that the effective leadership skills found here are shared with middle leaders new to the role.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 11 lessons and parts of lessons, two of which were joint observations with the headteacher.
- Inspectors gathered information from a range of school documents, including policies, school improvement plans, pupil progress information, records of the checks the school carries out on the quality of teaching, safeguarding documents, local authority reports, pupils' work and information for families such as that found on the school website.
- Inspectors heard pupils reading, heard their views about their time at school, attended an assembly and circulated amongst pupils at play and in the dining room. They scrutinised samples of work from all age ranges and all subjects.
- Discussions were held with governors, members of the leadership team and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of parent surveys made by the school and 31 views from the online questionnaire (Parent View), as well as views that parents and carers shared with inspectors during the inspection.

Inspection team

Christine Fogg, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Penny Spencer

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Higham Primary School is slightly smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils of minority ethnic heritage is below average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is also below average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium, additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils from service families, is below average. There are no children in local authority care on the roll.
- The proportions of disabled pupils and those who have special needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school is a member of the Gravesham Rural Consortium of schools.
- The school provides breakfast and after-school clubs for pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and raise achievement and standards further by:
 - ensuring that the recently revised marking policy is used consistently and matches the good practice seen in English, so that pupils understand how to improve their work in every subject
 - finding out where teachers feel most knowledgeable so that good practice and subject knowledge are developed in order that all teachers have good knowledge and understanding that enables them to teach all subjects with the same high level of expertise that they use in other lessons.
- Develop leadership and management to become outstanding by:
 - sharing the outstanding practice already in the school with new middle leaders
 - sustaining the useful links established with the rural consortium to maintain high expectations that are shared with all teachers.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- In the past, attainment on entry was above average but the difference now is small. Children make good progress in the Reception class because teaching is good or outstanding. Children have plenty of opportunities to practise reading, writing and their use of number in creative ways. This means that a large number of pupils reached a good level of development last year and were well prepared to start learning in Year 1. This is an improvement since the last inspection.
- Pupils in Year 1 make good improvements in learning about letters and sounds (phonics). The school's information shows that the number reaching the expected standard is above the national average.
- Year 2 pupils consistently end the year with attainment that is above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils apply their literacy skills well in a range of lessons because the curriculum provides a range of opportunities to practise what has been learned. However, in the past two years not enough pupils have reached the highest level. Good progress in Key Stage 1 is built on by excellent progress in Key Stage 2 with higher-than-average numbers of pupils making progress that is exceptional.
- Attainment at the end of Year 6 is above the national average and has improved over the last three years; current school information and the work seen in books indicate that this trend is likely to continue.
- Pupils supported through the pupil premium make similar or better progress than their peers in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2012, by the end of the year there was no gap in Year 6 between pupils eligible for the pupil premium and others. This means that the gap between groups of pupils has been narrowing quickly. Current school information shows that the progress of pupils supported through the pupil premium is variable, with some making much better progress than their peers. However, where there is a gap showing slower progress, the pupils concerned are just under two terms behind their peers.
- The gap between boys' and girls' achievement in the school has closed. Careful attention to the curriculum means that boys and girls have opportunities to do well.
- Sports funding is used to provide coaching, which teachers also attend, to improve pupils' physical skills and develop their understanding of team sports.
- The small number of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs often make better progress than their peers and achieve well.
- The small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language do as well as their peers.

The quality of teaching is good

- The majority of teaching is at least good. Teachers usually plan very effectively to ensure that there is range of activities to meet each pupil's learning needs as well as to provide challenge. The pupils work hard with enthusiasm and produce large amounts of high-quality work; even the youngest are determined to do well and complete everything. The pace of lessons is usually good and there are often high expectations for all learners. Sometimes, however, although expectations are high, the questions that teachers ask do not help the pupils to become better thinkers.
- Good teaching means that pupils are enthusiastic and alert in the majority of lessons. They are active learners and talk about their learning with enthusiasm. For example, pupils asked probing questions and showed great insight and empathy in a lesson about Greek gods. When teaching is not good the pupils look disappointed with the work, even though they still try hard.

- Teachers often mark pupils' work with helpful comments; this is done well in English but is inconsistent across other subjects. In the best examples, pupils respond to their teachers' comments to improve their work.
- Pupils know their targets and can explain what they mean and how they need to improve. Useful personal target cards on display show all support staff what the pupils' current targets are for English and mathematics so the correct support can be provided. Pupils often use their understanding of phonics to develop reading and the spelling of new words across the curriculum, for example writing descriptions about Aztec rituals in history work.
- Children in the Reception class participate well in teacher-led activities and then use their learning to make their creative play realistic and enjoyable. Pupils wrote inventories while loading a removal van and portions of food were compared in size in the play house. Safety was a key feature of the outdoor theme and children shifting logs or boxes enjoyed dressing themselves in the correct safety clothing. The resources are of high quality and teachers' planning ensures that adult support helps all children to learn well in an active and imaginative environment.
- Small-group activities are purposeful and well planned so that pupils can catch up quickly and no longer need additional help. Regular progress meetings ensure that pupils receive the precise intervention needed to help them to catch up so that they will no longer need additional support.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special needs are supported very well. The school has carefully adjusted the teaching classes to provide a bespoke, nurturing and developmental curriculum for one small group and this has improved their attendance and well-being as well as their achievement.
- Pupils' books show a good range of activities, providing interest and challenge, particularly in English and mathematics. This is not always the case in other subjects. Where the teachers' subject knowledge is good, the work is of high quality and provides interesting tasks to help pupils explain their learning and make excellent progress. When teachers are less confident in the subject, the tasks completed by pupils are useful but not so exciting or challenging and so pupils do not make outstanding progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The school is a place where pupils say they feel safe, happy and they enjoy their learning. They talk confidently about being safe; they move around the school safely and play energetically but respect others in the same space.
- Attendance is high. It has improved significantly for some pupils because of the attention that the school has given to ensuring that their time in school is not stressful and meets their needs.
- There have been no 'red-card' incidents (final warnings for bad behaviour) in the past two terms and this follows a rapid decline in sanctions over time. Pupils understand the benefits of 'golden time' and they work hard to make sure that they participate in this reward system with their peers.
- The pupils say that bullying is rare. They know the difference between bullying and falling out between friends. They also know about cyber bullying and how to keep safe when using the internet.
- Behaviour in lessons is exemplary because the pupils are active learners. They are confident talk partners and group work helps them to solve problems, find answers themselves and pose new questions. Pupils are rarely passive because good teaching means that they are engaged and want to contribute to discussions, ask questions and listen attentively.
- A recent school survey of parents' and carers' views shows that the large majority think that behaviour is good and that the school deals with it well. All of the parents and carers spoken to by inspectors praised the school for the way it cares for pupils and helps them to learn and behave well, and those who contacted inspectors praised the school for its care and good teaching.

- Leaders effectively promote equality of opportunity for all pupils and staff, and are proactive in tackling any form of discrimination.

The leadership and management are good

- Good leadership has ensured that the key actions from the last Ofsted inspection have been tackled well. Teaching has improved to become good overall, with appropriate plans in place for this improvement to continue in order that teaching becomes outstanding. Work is now matched to pupils' needs, new schemes support progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and learning targets are in place for all classes. Underperformance of staff is not tolerated. A range of strategies has been used to improve teaching; twice a term teachers come together as a learning community to discuss learning and teaching and share good practice. The school also uses links with the rural consortium so that teachers and leaders can research ideas for a range of school improvement activities and share good practice.
- There is a robust performance management system that links personal targets to school priorities and uses the national Teachers' Standards. This system makes clear the school's high expectations and holds teachers accountable for pupils' progress and improvements in teaching. Progression through salary points depends upon fully meeting all agreed targets and this is carefully logged and appropriately shared with governors. The development of teaching has also been significant in developing middle leaders so that English and mathematics are now led well. This means that the headteacher can now focus on new priorities.
- A new marking policy is in place and this has started to improve all pupils' understanding of how well they are progressing. Inspectors saw an improvement in the quality of marking in current books when they compared it with books from last year. Middle leaders know their role in helping to embed this policy in all years and subjects.
- The curriculum provides good opportunities for learning in English and mathematics as well as developing social skills and enabling pupils to learn what is right and wrong. Pupils have opportunities to learn about people in other countries, and a link with a village in India has provided the opportunity for developing a deeper understanding of other cultures. Pupils have had their designs for anti-speeding posters made into signs to improve safety in the village. The school has rightly decided to review aspects of the curriculum that have not had the highest priority and new middle leaders have been appointed to do this. For instance, a new science leader will lead and monitor this aspect of the new curriculum that is expected to be in place by September 2014. The school recognises that this is an area where English and mathematics are already used well but expect new leadership to develop this further.
- All pupils are tracked carefully, with detailed discussions about progress taking place six times each year. All staff are involved in these discussions, with some pupil progress discussions forming part of performance management reviews. Part of this process ensures that pupil premium funding is used to ensure that all pupils entitled to the grant make good progress, and there has been a year-on-year reduction in the gap between the achievement of eligible pupils and others.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage has been transformed into a vibrant learning environment that is well led and managed. Children now have a range of learning opportunities planned to meet their needs because data are collected regularly, analysed carefully and used to track progress. Further improvements are planned for the outdoor environment and the school has used research trips to outstanding settings to gather ideas for the planned improvements. The school now needs to find out more about the range of experience that children have had before they enter the school. Currently there are areas of low attainment on entry that need to be explained.
- Safeguarding arrangements are thorough and up to date.
- Local authority support has been useful and has reduced appropriately as the school has made improvements.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors know the school well and provide good support and challenge. They can explain how the pupil premium grant is spent and what difference it has made to pupils' learning. They know how well the school is doing compared with all other schools as well as with schools like theirs. They know that the school is safe and pupils usually behave well. They know what the school has done to improve behaviour. They are proud of the changes that have been made since the last inspection but know what still needs to be done and how the headteacher plans to carry out the improvements. They talk with understanding about the relentless drive to improve teaching and the links this has with performance management. The governors are keen that parents understand the work that they do and have organised surveys to gather views from parents as well as attending parents' evenings to be available for informal discussions. The governors know how the school is using the School Sport funding and are rightly proud of the girls' football team's recent triumph. Governor training has been effective in the past but they have rightly identified that it is time to plan a new training programme. Governors' minutes highlight the opportunities taken to challenge and support the school but would benefit from a little more detail so that new governors or those who cannot attend a meeting will have a better understanding of the discussions.

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	118262
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	426457

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Maynard
Headteacher	Tracy Coombs
Date of previous school inspection	October 2011
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