

Palmarsh Primary School

St George's Place, Hythe, Kent, CT21 6NE

Inspection dates

28–29 November 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		Requires improvement	3
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

- Teaching is not consistently good across the school, with the result that pupils' achievement in English and mathematics is not yet good.
- Teachers do not always provide activities which give the right amount of challenge for all groups of pupils.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work does not always help pupils to improve, especially where untidy handwriting or errors in spelling and grammar are not corrected. Opportunities for pupils to make improvements in response to teachers' marking are not regular enough in every class.
- Pupils have too few opportunities to practise their reading with an adult, or to practise their writing skills in subjects other than English.
- Teaching assistants do not always provide good support when working with the less able pupils.
- While most pupils behave well, they do not always have positive attitudes to learning, particularly if activities are not well matched to their needs.
- Leadership roles through the school are not well developed and so opportunities are sometimes lost to support quickly any teachers who need to improve their practice.

The school has the following strengths

- Parents and carers, staff and pupils are extremely positive about all aspects of this welcoming school and speak highly of the headteacher. They all agree that the school keeps pupils safe.
- Children achieve well in the Reception class because they enjoy learning in the newly established, well-organised environment.
- An exciting variety of visitors and trips, including residential journeys, supports pupils' personal development and provides memorable experiences.
- Good relationships are developed with parents and carers and this is helping to improve the proportion of pupils who attend school regularly.
- The governing body supports and challenges the school well. School improvement plans identify appropriate areas for improvement.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed seven lessons, six jointly with the headteacher. The headteacher was observed giving feedback to a teacher.
- The headteacher and the inspector looked at pupils' work together.
- The inspector listened to pupils reading, looked at pupils' books in lessons and spoke to pupils about their work. The inspector also observed playtime and watched an assembly.
- Meetings were held with staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governor representatives, and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector scrutinised a number of documents, including the school's checks on how well it is doing, the school's improvement plan, governing body minutes, records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding, and data on pupils' performance.
- The inspector took account of the 20 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) received during the inspection and spoke to some parents and carers as they brought their children to school. The 14 responses from staff questionnaires were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Joanna Toulson, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school. In September, it expanded from four to five classes, two of which are mixed-age classes. Most pupils are of White British origin.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and children who are looked after by the local authority) is much higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is above the national average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is much higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school at other than the normal times is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The headteacher joined the school in January 2012. There has been a substantial change in staff since then, with newly appointed teachers in four of the five classes.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching and improve pupils' achievement in English and mathematics to good and better, by ensuring that:
 - work is more precisely matched to pupils' levels of ability so it is neither too hard nor too easy and pupils remain focused on their learning throughout lessons
 - there are more opportunities for pupils to practise their writing in subjects other than English
 - all pupils have frequent opportunities to read with an adult
 - teachers' marking is specific about how pupils' work can be improved and pupils are given time to read and act on teachers' feedback
 - pupils develop good handwriting and an accurate understanding of spelling and grammar
 - teaching assistants receive appropriate training and guidance so that they provide at least good support when working with pupils in lessons.
- Improve leadership and management of the school by:
 - providing training to ensure that leaders at all levels have the skills needed to support school improvement and are given the time to do so.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement requires improvement because too few pupils make good progress.
- A drive to make writing more fun, such as writing about the landing of a space ship on the school roof or the arrival of a hot air balloon, resulted in pupils making better progress in writing in 2013. However, pupils' books show that pupils are not developing good handwriting, and mistakes in spelling and grammar are not consistently being corrected. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise their writing skills in subjects other than English. As a result, they are not making consistently good progress in writing. Pupils' achievement in reading as the pupils move through the school is slowed because they have too few opportunities to read to an adult.
- Achievement in mathematics is hampered because teachers do not always make sure that pupils' work is at the right level of difficulty for them. As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in the Year 6 national tests has fallen over the last three years.
- Children make a good start and do well in Reception. They join the school with skills, knowledge and understanding that are typically below the levels expected for their age, although they do vary from year to year.
- While the national tests at the end of Year 6 show that pupils attain average standards in reading, writing and mathematics, progress across the school is not consistent or rapid enough to raise attainment further.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make similar progress to their peers. Additional one-to-one and small group support is usually effective, but the support these pupils receive from teaching assistants in class is not strong enough to make sure they make good progress.
- Pupils who join the school at other than the normal times settle quickly and make similar progress to their peers.
- The school uses the pupil premium funding to provide a wide variety of support to close the gaps between those known to be eligible and others. A homework club, small group work to develop self-confidence and one-to-one tuition are all examples of the activities provided which have resulted in the closing of the gap in their attainment and that of their peers in English and mathematics.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is not consistently good across the school. Sometimes, work is too easy for more able pupils and too difficult for less able pupils. On occasions, teachers do not adapt activities to maintain the focus of all pupils on their learning so that they make the best progress.
- A marking policy of using a pink pen to identify strengths and a green pen to suggest improvements is followed by some teachers, but this is not consistent. This means that, in some classes, pupils do not improve their skills as quickly as they could.
- The effectiveness of teaching assistants varies across the school. They provide some good support, for example when teaching phonics in small groups. However, the support they provide in lessons is sometimes not effective. This is because of poor subject knowledge or low expectations of what pupils can achieve. Occasionally, work is not adapted well enough to enable less able pupils to be successful independently, so that they rely too much on support from an adult.
- As the result of a great deal of work, often by parent volunteers, Reception children now have a well-organised and exciting inside and outside environment in which to learn and play. They benefit from engaging activities that hold their attention, such as looking for objects that are magnetic, planting bulbs in the garden, making a paper watch, and sorting numbers on the

fence.

- Where teaching is most effective, activities are carefully chosen to make pupils think and work hard. For example, in an effective mathematics lesson, pupils were encouraged to use correct vocabulary when making three-dimensional models from straws and recording what they found.
- Sports funding is used effectively to develop a wide range of skills in collaboration with local secondary and primary schools. A sports coach provides weekly teaching to pupils and training for teachers. This provides opportunities for competitive sports, including boys' and girls' football teams. This, together with activities at lunchtimes, promotes healthy lifestyles well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Sometimes, pupils are not motivated to concentrate on their learning, especially if activities are not well matched to their needs, and this can slow the progress they make.
- Pupils mostly respond quickly to adults' instructions. They are friendly and welcoming. Behaviour in the playground, the dining hall and during assemblies is good.
- The school has recently begun to keep records of bullying incidents and these show that they are rare. An anti-bullying fortnight has given pupils a good understanding about the different forms that bullying can take.
- Pupils understand how to keep safe on the internet and say visitors to the school help them to understand how to keep safe on the roads and on railways.
- There is an evident sense of care throughout the school and so pupils feel safe and valued. They know they can talk to an adult if they have worries or concerns. The school does not tolerate discrimination of any kind and racial incidents are rare.
- Pupils develop good personal skills. They are attentive in assemblies and were interested to learn about the Paralympics from a visiting basketball team.
- The school offers many opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities. They help in assemblies, learn how to settle disagreements on the playground and make reports to the governing body and parents.
- The school has established several incentives to encourage good attendance, including visits to the local cinema for any pupil attending all the time. As a result, although attendance is not good, systems to raise attendance are securing improvements.

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because they have not brought about improvement in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement rapidly enough.
- The headteacher has brought together a staff team that is working together and keen to see pupils do well. She has identified areas for improvement and there are appropriate plans in place to tackle them. However, the rate of improvement is too slow because there is insufficient opportunity for leaders other than the headteacher to check how well pupils are doing or to work with teachers who need to improve their practice.
- There are appropriate systems in place to make sure that the performance of teachers is linked to their pay.
- Arrangements for safeguarding of children meet requirements. Good, frequent training for staff means that all staff know what to do if they have concerns. Detailed records are kept when there are safeguarding concerns raised and appropriate action is taken. Staff are checked to ensure they are suitable to work with children and effective safety measures are in place when visitors come to the school.
- The improvements in the rate of progress in writing in 2013, the improving rate of attendance, the improvements in the provision inside and outside for Reception children, and the good support and challenge provided by the governing body all demonstrate that school leaders have the capacity to make further improvements.

- The school is committed to giving equal opportunity to all and, for example, uses part of the pupil premium funding on measures to promote good attendance for eligible pupils. Good relationships are fostered throughout the school and, as a result, pupils get on well with each other.
- Much is being done to promote good relationships with parents and gain their confidence. Parents say that the headteacher and her staff are often available before or after school to talk about any concerns they may have. The headteacher makes good use of outside agencies, for example counselling services, to support parents and their children.
- The curriculum makes a positive contribution to pupils' personal development. Pupils benefit from a range of interesting activities, as well as trips and visits. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to practise their writing across a range of subjects or to practise their reading with an adult.
- The local authority has provided additional support to the school, including the moderation of teachers' assessments and support to the new headteacher. Despite this, however, improvement has not been sufficiently rapid.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has become increasingly effective in holding the school to account because the headteacher provides good information about the work of the school. Governors recognise the strengths of the school, but have challenged school leaders about the fall in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check as well as the decline in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in the Year 6 mathematics test. They are aware of the quality of teaching and are given information so that they can make decisions about linking pay to teachers' performance. They are involved in making decisions about how to allocate funding, such as the pupil premium and sports funding. They understand how the performance of the pupils in their school compares to that of pupils nationally. Governors have had the necessary training to recruit school staff safely. Other safeguarding procedures also meet statutory requirements. Governors are well placed to support the school's further improvement.

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	118490
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	427305

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	101
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Cannon
Headteacher	Sara Wakefield
Date of previous school inspection	19–20 January 2011
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