

Meeching Valley Primary School

Valley Road, Newhaven, BN9 9UT

Inspection dates

5–6 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	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:

- There is too much variation in the quality of teaching and not enough that is consistently good or outstanding. Teaching over time has not been good enough and does not always provide sufficient challenge.
- Teachers and other adults do not test out pupils' knowledge in a variety of ways or stretch pupils' thinking. A few lessons lack a sense of pace and urgency for learning.
- All pupils do not make consistently good progress, so pupils' achievement over time has been erratic. As a result, pupils have gaps in their knowledge and are still catching up to where they should be.
- Attainment is below national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. There are differences in the attainment between groups. For example, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals do not achieve as well as their classmates.
- The behaviour of a small minority of pupils and some bullying by the same pupils mean that behaviour typically requires improvement. Attendance is below the national average.
- It is only more recently that all leaders including governors have started to show good capacity for improvement, which has in the past slowed down the pace of change.

The school has the following strengths:

- The headteacher has put in place a range of initiatives to improve pupils' progress, teaching and learning, behaviour and attendance and the curriculum. As a result, these areas are now improving more rapidly.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have a more exciting learning environment that supports their learning from low starting points when they join the school.
- The consistent management of pupils' behaviour has improved pupils' personal development and attitudes to learning. Most pupils enjoy the various incentives to help them behave well and to attend regularly.
- Leaders take firm action to maintain pupils' safety, and as a result, they feel safe in school.
- The governing body is well informed, asks leaders challenging questions and more effectively holds the school to account.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 11 lessons or part-lessons. Of these, almost all were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. The inspector also observed a teaching assistant training session.
- The inspector listened to pupils reading, sampled guided reading sessions and sessions where pupils were being taught phonics (the sounds letters make). The inspector looked at pupils' work and class portfolios in lessons and spoke to pupils about their work. The inspector also observed playtimes, breakfast club and met more formally with a group of pupils to listen to their views on school life.
- Inspectors met with the Chair of the Governing Body. Meetings were also held with all senior staff as well and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector took account of 13 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), as well as an informal discussion with the newly formed Parent Forum group.
- As this inspection began as a monitoring inspection, questionnaires were not circulated to staff and so their views of the provision were collected during conversations held during the course of the inspection.
- The inspector considered a wide range of school documentation, including records of school checks on the quality of teaching, school improvement planning, the sports premium action plan and records relating to behaviour, attendance, safeguarding and the tracking of pupils' progress.

Inspection team

Sheila Browning, Lead Inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- Meeching Valley is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils come from White British backgrounds. Few pupils are from a minority ethnic background, speak English as an additional language or are at the early stages of learning to speak English.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium, which is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those in care and those from other groups, is much higher than the national average. There are no pupils from service families.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment in English and mathematics.
- The school was deemed to require special measures at its previous section 5 inspection in March 2012. Since that time an Additional inspector has carried out five monitoring inspections. During this time there have been significant changes in the leadership and management of the school and staffing structure since the last inspection. An executive headteacher was appointed by the local authority for just over 18 months to strengthen leadership and support improvement. The Chair of the Governing Body resigned, the vice chair was appointed as Chair, and the committees were restructured. Several teachers, governors and teaching assistants have left and new appointments have been made. The school was asked by the local authority to take additional children in the Early Years Foundation Stage; this means that the school has run two classes on entry to the school from September 2013.
- The school runs its own breakfast club.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to ensure that all is good or better by:
 - ensuring that pupils' experience of learning is consistently interesting and engaging
 - ensuring that teachers and teaching assistants assess pupils' understanding more effectively, to help to extend pupils' thinking and ensure that pupils, especially those more able, are challenged to do their best
 - ensuring that the marking policy is used effectively to help increase pupils' learning and ensure all work is presented to a higher standard
 - making sure guided reading sessions have tasks set that extend pupils' reading skills .
- Raise pupils' achievement further by ensuring:
 - the levels of progress for all pupils are raised further
 - pupils regularly practise their written grammar and punctuation and spelling skills and extend their written vocabulary

- pupils are more confident to use their mathematical skills to solve problems
- the gap in attainment between pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and other pupils in the school continues to close.

■ Improve leadership and management at all levels by:

- embedding recent initiatives to raise pupils' attainment and improve achievement so that the pace of learning accelerates
 - reviewing the provision for those pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding, and identifying and resolving the reasons for their underachievement, so that the gaps between them and their peers close more rapidly
 - tackling the small minority of pupils whose behaviour slows down learning for others and eliminating incidents of bullying
 - consolidating the work to improve pupils' attendance.
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Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The achievement of pupils requires improvement because their progress in reading, writing and mathematics remains below those nationally and age-related. Previous wide discrepancies in rates of progress between groups of pupils, key stages and subjects are reducing. Pupils continue to make up progress as a result of weaker teaching in the past, albeit slowly.
- Pupils' achievement at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2013 showed improvement, especially in mathematics and writing, with girls performing better than boys. However, gaps widened in reading. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make similar progress to that of their classmates. Whereas, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, generally make better progress from their starting points. This is because of the good support and extra guidance to ensure they achieve well. Nonetheless, the most-able pupils are insufficiently challenged and do not achieve their full potential.
- Children in Reception typically make reasonable progress from their very low starting points, especially in communication, physical, social and emotional development. The development of early reading skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is now effective. Young children and pupils benefit from a systematic grounding in the linking of sounds and letters (phonics). As a result, pupils are more confident readers by Years 2 and 6 and are closer to national standards. Guided reading lessons and group activities are occasionally insufficiently challenging.
- The progress of those known to be eligible for pupil premium support is still not good enough. Despite extra help and support, the gap has widened. By the end of Year 2, pupils are nearly two terms behind in English and are just over a term behind in mathematics compared to their peers. By Year 6, pupils are, on average, lagging behind their peers by just over two terms in both English and mathematics.
- Evidence in pupils' books confirms that inspired by topics and themes, pupils have more opportunities to write at length and develop their numeracy skills in different subjects. Handwriting and presentation are improving, but pupils' punctuation, spelling and use of grammar are weak and range of vocabulary narrow. Their mental recall abilities and problem solving skills remain fragile.
- The newly formed Parent Forum is a significant breakthrough for the school in terms of getting more parents and carers involved in supporting their child's learning.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement and is not yet good because in some lessons teachers fail to challenge pupils sufficiently, leading to a slow pace of learning.
- Teachers have worked hard to develop their skills and improve lesson plans, and to provide more interesting activities and support linked to pupils' individual learning needs.
- In the most effective learning pupils apply their skills across a range of subjects. Pupils say they like lively and engaging lessons and are eager and motivated. Pupils respond positively to opportunities to talk about their learning, in pairs or groups. In a Year 6 English lesson using role play, pupils discovered their classroom had been burgled and then interrogated the headteacher, class teacher and a visiting police officer without mercy in role as detectives, in preparation for their crime scene writing.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved over time. The classroom is more stimulating and purposeful. Carefully planned activities help develop children's curiosity and low communication skills. Children choose learning activities outside, often developing their writing skills and awareness of number counting.
- The checking and supporting of pupils' progress have improved. Rigorous systems ensure all teachers know the progress of individual pupils in their class and pupils know their own targets.

Although most teachers correct pupils' work and provide guidance, not all pupils take notice to help improve their work.

- Teaching assistants attend pupil progress meetings and are training to understand the age and ability levels pupils should reach to ensure their support is more focused. Some teachers and adults assess pupils' understanding of their learning through questioning, and adapt tasks to maximise their learning. Some pupils fail to make good progress because too often questions require only simple answers.
- Some guided reading sessions do not extend pupils' reading skills sufficiently because, due to tasks being too simple, they become disengaged.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

- Behaviour requires improvement and is not yet good because a few pupils who find it difficult to conduct themselves appropriately are not always able to sustain good behaviour all of the time. School records show that a small minority of pupils persist in bullying others. This was confirmed by pupils and a few parents and carers.
- Leaders set clear expectations about behaviour and bullying. Instances of poor behaviour and any known unkindness are dealt with firmly. A refurbished pastoral room is used to support pupils in their anger management and when they feel vulnerable. This is starting to help reduce sudden outbursts by some.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure requires improvement. Pupils told the inspector that they felt safe, but that learning time was lost when teachers dealt with the few pupils causing concern, and not attending to the rest of the class. In all classes observed relationships between adults and pupils and between the pupils themselves were positive.
- Attendance, though improving, is below the national average. Leaders take firm action, and rigorous measures have included providing alarm clocks, collecting children from home and supporting families' social and welfare needs. The introduction of two attendance bears has provided another incentive for pupils to improve their attendance.
- The school council and various sports and house captains give pupils responsibilities and provide a listening ear for their views.

The leadership and management

require improvement

- The leadership and management of the school require improvement because the initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and increase pupils' progress have been too slow and as a result, variations between classes and groups still exist.
- The now more rigorous tracking of pupils' progress indicates that those eligible for pupil premium funding achieve less well than their peers. Although improvements are seen in pupils' reading, writing and mathematics, their legacy of underachievement in past years still holds some pupils back.
- The previous good support from the executive headteacher set the foundations for further improvements. The headteacher has grown in confidence and the leadership team has been strengthened. Staff say they feel part of a good team. Restructuring has led to clearer roles and responsibilities with two key stage leader appointments.
- School improvement plan priorities are more precise and easier to assess if they have been achieved. All leaders are responsible for accelerating pupils' achievement, and staff are stepping up to the pace and challenge and know that they are accountable for the progress of the pupils they teach.
- A number of improvements have been secured: the Reception classroom is more purposeful; phonics is now better taught; the support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs has been reviewed; the range of subjects is more interesting; all pupils practise handwriting and more pupils are gaining 'pen licences'; there is a daily focus on reading; and the school environment celebrates pupils' work better. Nonetheless, despite these improvements, pupils' progress has been slow to accelerate.

- Staff performance is closely managed and salary progression is related directly to pupils' progress. Staff and governors know that teaching quality and pupils' achievement must continue to improve.
- Evaluations of teaching and learning are searching and accurate. Previous very weak teaching has been eradicated. Adults work together and are receptive to support and guidance. Visits to other schools, local authority support and training within the school have supported teaching.
- Pupils' progress information is analysed in detail and is used to plan additional support. However, some gaps in the achievement of groups of pupils remain, so the interventions to support them are rightly under even greater scrutiny to ensure they work quickly.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has improved with the enriched curriculum through opportunities for role-play, and sports-based and breakfast clubs. Additionally, whole-school visits to the theatre and a science centre act as learning 'hooks' that capture pupils' interests and support their social and cultural development.
- The school is inclusive and there is a firm commitment to equality of opportunity. Discrimination is not tolerated, but a small minority of pupils find it hard to sustain good behaviour and show kindness to others.
- The primary school sports funding is carefully planned to provide additional resources and specialist teaching. Pupils enjoy the benefits of specialist coaching in a range of sporting activities and more pupils take part in sports-based clubs and competitions. However, it is too soon to identify the impact of these actions. Pupils said, 'We are more active and fit and know about healthy eating and lifestyles', reflecting their increased attendance at these clubs.
- The local authority has provided good support and guidance and continues to do so.

■ The governance of the school:

- Since the last inspection governors are more actively involved; they visit regularly, know the school well and increasingly provide valuable help and support. Governors link the quality of teaching more directly with the attainment and progress of pupils. They know that progress has been an issue in recent years and are working closely with leaders to tackle remaining inconsistencies in teaching. They understand performance management targets and ensure that promotion and pay are linked to teachers' effectiveness. Governors check the use of the pupil premium and the additional funding for sport. They have attended various training events and know how to compare the school's results with others' locally and nationally. As a result, they ask challenging questions of school leaders. Governors ensure safeguarding arrangements are fulfilled fully, staff are vetted and all training is up to date.

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	114440
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	432238

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	190
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Robinson
Headteacher	Davina Wakelin
Date of previous school inspection	15–16 March 2012
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