

Palace Wood Primary School

Talbot Road, Allington, Maidstone, ME16 0HB

Inspection dates 11–12 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Numerous staff changes since the previous inspection have frustrated leaders' efforts to improve teaching.
- Teaching overall is not yet strong enough to ensure that all pupils make good progress.
- Progress is uneven across the school. It is not rapid enough to ensure that all pupils fulfil their potential and achieve well, including the most able.
- Attainment at the end of Year 6 has been consistently average for the past three years. Too few pupils attain the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Standards were well below average at the end of Year 2 in 2014.
- Pupils make slower progress in writing than in reading and mathematics. In 2014, attainment in writing dipped to below average at the end of both key stages. Too few pupils attain the highest levels in writing at the end of Year 2 and Year 6.
- The gap between disadvantaged pupils' achievement and that of other pupils is too wide.
- Historical weaknesses in the teaching of spelling in Key Stages 1 and 2 mean that pupils are not sufficiently equipped with some of the basic skills needed to write well. Sometimes work in pupils' books is untidy and the quality of handwriting is poor.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to develop literacy skills by completing longer pieces of written work and writing in different subjects.
- Not all teachers mark pupils' work according to the school's policy. At times basic spelling errors are not identified and corrected.
- Teachers' expectations of pupils' work are not consistently high enough. They do not always set work which challenges pupils sufficiently, particularly the most able.

The school has the following strengths

- The executive headteacher and head of school provide strong leadership. They have secured rapid and substantial improvements in teaching during this academic year.
- Pupils make good progress in those classes where teaching is effective. Achievement in mathematics and reading has improved.
- Pupils feel safe and behave well.
- Children make rapid progress in the Reception classes.
- Middle leaders' roles have developed quickly. They play an effective role in securing improvements in teaching and learning.
- Governors have a thorough understanding of the school's work. They contribute well to the school's improvement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 18 lessons or part-lessons, including five joint observations with the executive headteacher or head of school.
- Discussions were held with the executive headteacher, head of school, senior leaders, teachers, members of staff, parents and pupils. Discussions were also held with the Chair of the Governing Body and three additional governors. The lead inspector met with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 148 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, they considered the views expressed by parents informally at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and considered a range of policies and documents. These included the school's improvement plan, information about pupils' progress, attendance records, and safeguarding policies and procedures. Inspectors also looked at samples of the minutes of governing body meetings.
- Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work provided by the school, as well as in lessons. They also listened to pupils in Key Stage 2 read.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Sarah O'Donnell	Additional Inspector
Liz Kissane	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is below average. Pupil premium is additional government funding to support those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportions who speak English as an additional language are below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- The school provides full-time early years provision in two Reception classes.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The current interim executive headteacher was appointed in September 2014. She is also headteacher of Woodlands Junior School. She is in Palace Wood Primary School three days a week. She works closely with the interim head of school, who oversees the day-to-day management of the school.
- The school has a breakfast club and an after-school club, both of which are run privately and are inspected separately. There is also a privately run nursery on site, which is inspected separately.
- Most teachers have joined the school since the previous inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that pupils achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have consistently high expectations of all pupils and of the quality of their work
 - set work which is sufficiently challenging for all pupils, particularly the most able
 - adhere to the school's marking policy and routinely identify and address basic errors in pupils' work.
- Increase pupils' achievement, particularly in writing, by ensuring that pupils:
 - complete longer pieces of written work than they currently do and regularly write at length in different subjects
 - develop a consistent and legible handwriting style
 - are taught the basic knowledge and skills needed to spell accurately.
- Reduce the gap between disadvantaged pupils' achievement and their peers.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The executive headteacher has quickly established positive and professional relationships in the school. Staff feel valued and are increasingly confident about securing further improvements in the quality of their practice. Staff morale is good. One teacher commented, 'I am very proud of the progress this school is making. We have a shared aim and we do our best to achieve it. I hope we are on our way to making a very positive impact on pupils' lives.'
- Shared aspirations for the school and strong teamwork are ensuring rapid developments in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. Numerous changes in staffing have slowed progress in improving teaching. However, the school is now in a more settled phase and the quality of teaching is improving rapidly.
- The school is determined to ensure that all pupils have equal opportunity to succeed. For example, leaders have ensured that teachers have higher expectations of pupils, including boys and disadvantaged pupils, so that their progress is as good as other pupils. Any incidents of discrimination are taken seriously and tackled robustly.
- The executive headteacher has established rigorous performance management procedures. Teachers and other members of staff are more accountable and have a better understanding of their responsibilities for pupils' achievement.
- The executive headteacher and head of school have a clear, accurate view of teaching. Training and courses are carefully matched to staff needs so that resources are used effectively. An element of weak teaching has been eradicated.
- The head of school teaches alongside teachers to help them to improve their practice, including those recently appointed. This is ensuring that improvements in teaching are sustained.
- Leaders' evaluations of the school's work are accurate. They have identified the main priorities for development which are understood by all staff. For example, there is a current whole-school focus on improving pupils' achievement in writing and appropriate changes have been made to the teaching of basic skills.
- Middle leaders' roles have developed substantially since the executive headteacher's appointment. This has strengthened the school's capacity to maintain improvements considerably. They work alongside senior leaders to review pupils' achievement and to prioritise future developments. They regularly check pupils' progress by looking at pupils' books and observing lessons. They discuss information about the progress of all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, with teachers. They know what needs to be done to secure further improvements and share senior leaders' high expectations.
- The head of school provides strong leadership for mathematics. She is well respected by her colleagues and has been instrumental in raising achievement in mathematics. For example, she has provided training for teachers and teaching assistants to raise expectations of pupils and to increase pupils' engagement during mathematics lessons.
- The local authority provides effective support. It has worked with the governing body to ensure high quality interim leadership during a period of change for the school. Comprehensive and successful training has contributed substantially to improved leadership at all levels.
- In the past, additional funding has not been used well to support disadvantaged pupils' learning, leading to wide gaps between this group's achievement and their peers. Current leaders have sharpened the use of funding to ensure that it is closely targeted to address pupils' needs. For example, a counsellor provides effective support for some pupils. This is improving pupils' social development and their readiness to learn, so that they are making better progress.
- Primary sport funding is used well to promote physical activity. For example, training provided by specialist sports coaches is boosting teachers' expertise. Teachers plan enjoyable lessons with a focus on developing pupils' skills. The introduction of 'bronze', 'silver' and 'gold' skill levels in lessons is increasing pupils' motivation. The proportions of pupils participating in competitions have increased.
- Leaders ensure that pupils learn a balanced range of subjects. Recent developments ensure that pupils have regular opportunities to learn the basic literacy and mathematical skills needed to achieve well.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Pupils are quiet and respectful during assemblies. They respond thoughtfully to questions such as, 'where do we come from?' and regularly consider issues such as diversity, respect and friendship. As a result, they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The executive headteacher ensures that safeguarding is given a high priority and safeguarding procedures have been strengthened. Arrangements meet statutory requirements.

■ The governance of the school:

- The role played by governors in challenging leaders has improved substantially since the previous inspection. They provide committed and knowledgeable support for the school's development. Governors are focused sharply on the difference their work is making to the school's success. They know how improved performance management procedures have increased staff accountability for pupils' achievement. They are well informed about the link between staff performance and salary progression, including awards for additional responsibilities, and ensure that pay awards are fair and consistent. Governors frequently visit the school and ask leaders pertinent questions about what they see, including about variations in the quality of teaching. They know how leaders are helping teachers to improve their practice. They regularly look at pupils' books and can talk about developments in the quality of teachers' marking from first-hand experience. Effective training has improved the way governors interpret information about how well the school is performing in relation to others nationally. They know how additional funds, such as pupil premium, are used and receive comprehensive reports from school leaders about the difference these are making to pupils' achievement. A governor with responsibility for safeguarding completes regular reviews of arrangements. This includes asking members of staff about what they would do if they had a concern. Leaders provide a safeguarding report to every governing body meeting. This ensures that safeguarding is given a high priority and governors have an up-to-date view of arrangements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite and respectful towards adults and each other. They behave well during playtimes and when moving around the school. Most parents who responded to the online questionnaire feel that pupils are well behaved.
- Expectations of behaviour have improved substantially since the previous inspection, particularly of boys' behaviour. Teachers feel well supported by senior leaders in dealing with incidents of poor behaviour. Behaviour logs indicate that incidents halved last term. Pupils understand that their behaviour has consequences and feel that teachers are fair.
- Most pupils want to do well and are interested and engaged during lessons. This makes a very positive contribution to their progress and enjoyment of school. Occasionally, however, some pupils lose concentration during lessons. When this is the case, they make slower progress, although it rarely disrupts the learning of others.
- Pupils' behave exceptionally well during assemblies. This is because they are routinely given responsibility to make choices and to consider challenging issues. They respond with interest and maturity.
- Attendance is average and steadily rising. Pupils' punctuality at the start of the school day has improved in response to teachers' and leaders' increased expectations.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say that they feel safe and know who to go to if they are worried. They have a good awareness of how to keep safe when using the internet.
- Pupils know what bullying is and say that it rarely happens. This view is supported by school records, which show that incidents are infrequent and dealt with promptly by leaders. Events such as assemblies provide regular reminders about the dangers of bullying and what to do if it occurs.
- Most parents consider pupils to be safe, happy and well cared for in school.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- There are too many differences in the quality of teaching to enable pupils to make consistently good progress. A large number of staff changes since the previous inspection have slowed improvements in teaching.
- While teachers' expectations are generally better than at the time of the previous inspection, differences remain and some teachers' expectations are still not high enough. In some cases the work set for pupils is not sufficiently challenging, particularly for the most able, so that they make slower progress.
- The teaching of writing requires improvement. Recent improvements in the teaching of grammar and punctuation mean that pupils' writing is increasingly accurate. However, pupils have too few opportunities

to practise their skills in long pieces of written work and by writing in different subjects.

- Handwriting skills are not taught consistently across the school. Some teachers' expectations of the quality of pupils' work are still not high enough.
- The quality of marking has improved since the previous inspection, particularly in mathematics. However, some variations remain, especially in pupils' writing books. For example, some teachers do not routinely identify and address basic spelling errors in pupils' work, so that pupils repeat the same mistakes in their work.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are increasingly confident about teaching reading and writing skills. They have attended phonics training and have visited other schools to learn from effective practice. Phonics and spelling skills are now taught consistently and regularly across the school and pupils' progress is regularly checked. However, while pupils make good progress in reading, developments have not yet secured the necessary improvements in pupils' written work.
- Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. Training ensures that they have a better understanding of how they can support pupils' learning, particularly disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. For example, extra reading help for pupils in Key Stage 2 is ensuring that these pupils are catching up more quickly.
- Teachers work closely with leaders to review their work and to identify aspects for development. They are keen to improve their teaching and are quick to put advice into practice. Those new to teaching are well supported by the head of school and other members of staff.
- Teachers have a better understanding of their responsibility for pupils' progress than at the time of the previous inspection. They regularly assess and review pupils' learning with leaders, including the progress made by disadvantaged pupils. This is helping them to make rapid changes in response to pupils' needs, and so quicken their progress.
- The teaching of mathematics has improved since the previous inspection. Teachers plan lessons which engage and interest pupils and build firmly on what they already know and understand. Increased opportunities for pupils to apply mathematical skills to solve problems are speeding up progress, particularly for the most able.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils do not make sufficiently rapid and sustained progress across the school. As a result, standards at the end of Year 6 are no better than average in reading, writing and mathematics. Variations in the quality of teaching mean that pupils' progress is inconsistent between classes and subjects.
- Pupils make slower progress in writing than in reading and mathematics. Some pupils' writing is hindered by untidy presentation and poor handwriting. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise and improve their writing skills by completing longer pieces of written work and by writing in different subjects. Variations in the quality of marking mean that basic spelling mistakes are not always routinely identified by teachers and this hinders pupils' progress.
- The most able pupils do not achieve as well as they should because teachers' expectations are still not high enough, despite recent improvements. While the proportion of pupils attaining the higher levels at the end of Year 6 increased in reading and mathematics in 2014, this success was not repeated in writing, where proportions were much lower than the national average. At the end of Year 2, the proportions attaining the higher levels were well below average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- In the past, boys achieved less well than girls because teachers' expectations of boys were not sufficiently high. The executive headteacher and head of school have ensured that this is no longer the case. Boys' progress accelerated in the last academic year, particularly in Year 6. This improvement has been sustained. While there are still variations between classes, boys make similar progress to girls overall in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers value boys' and girls' contributions equally and boys' attitudes to learning are more positive.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make similar progress to their classmates. They make good progress in those classes where teaching is consistently effective, because their needs are catered for very well. However, this is not the case in all classes, and some make slower progress where teaching is less effective.
- The most able pupils make variable progress. Some teachers have high expectations so that pupils make better progress. However, this is not always the case and in some classes, the most able pupils make slower progress.
- Weaknesses in the teaching of phonics and spelling in the past have hindered pupils' progress in writing. The results of the Year 1 phonics check were below average in 2013 and declined in 2014. Leaders have now established a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics across the school. This is helping to

address gaps in pupils' basic literacy skills and their progress in reading is improving rapidly.

- Parents regularly listen to pupils read in school, as well as at home. Leaders have tightened up the timetable so that no time is wasted and there are more opportunities for pupils to read.
- Historical weaknesses in teaching mean that disadvantaged pupils made slower progress than their classmates in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2014, their attainment was more than two years behind their peers in school and nationally in all subjects. Strong teaching in Year 6 ensured that this group made rapid progress in Year 6. However, there was too little time for this to fully make up for lost time. The gap increased in 2014.
- A higher proportion of better teaching is lifting achievement. A successful focus on the teaching of mathematics has accelerated pupils' progress substantially in this subject. Pupils now make good progress in reading and mathematics in most year groups and rapid progress in all subjects in Year 6.

The early years provision

is good

- Children join Reception year with skills and knowledge which are in line with those typical of their age, although this varies from year to year. They make good progress because adults understand their needs well and teaching is effective. Learning in Reception class provides a firm foundation for literacy and mathematics skills so that most are well prepared for Year 1.
- Children are curious and interested in the wide range of activities provided. Adults help them to think about what they would like to do during sessions when they can choose. This ensures that children get started quickly and no learning time is lost.
- Children are well behaved and happy to talk to visitors about their work. They feel safe and are taught to use equipment, such as scissors, safely and sensibly.
- Relationships between children are very good. For example, during the inspection one child was warmly welcomed to join other children who were making and cutting out butterflies. One child proudly showed her how he had completed the task, offering some tips to ensure success.
- Phonics skills are taught well in the Reception classes. Adults are currently focusing on developing children's writing skills, in line with whole-school priorities. For example, they encourage children to hold pens appropriately and provide extended opportunities for children to write for different purposes.
- The early years provision is well led. The early years leader has established effective links with parents and pre-schools. As a result, children settle quickly into the Reception classes and grow in confidence and independence.
- Adults regularly assess children's learning and use these assessments to plan future activities. Teachers and teaching assistants meet weekly to share information and discuss children's progress. This ensures that all adults contribute equally to children's learning. They use questioning well to explore children's understanding and to move their learning forward. For example, during the inspection a teaching assistant successfully developed children's understanding of pattern by drawing their attention to the brick patterns in the wall of the classroom.

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	135106
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	453644

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	387
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Perks
Headteacher	Mary Priestley
Date of previous school inspection	21–22 March 2013
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