

Little Common School

Shepherds Close, Bexhill-on-Sea, TN39 4SQ

Inspection dates 11–12 February 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils across the school make good progress. The standards they reach in national tests in Years 2 and 6 are rising year on year.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have successfully improved teaching and pupils' progress since the previous inspection. Leaders at all levels, including middle leaders and governors, know their school well. They work hard to achieve their goal of raising pupils' achievement, supported by a committed staff.
- Across the school, disadvantaged pupils make the same good progress as their peers in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2014 tests in Year 6, their progress exceeded that of disadvantaged pupils nationally in almost every area.
- Teaching is good. Increasing numbers of pupils are working at the highest levels for their age across the school because teachers have high expectations and provide good levels of challenge.
- Pupils really enjoy learning and work well together in lessons. They appreciate the interesting and engaging topics and activities that teachers plan for them. These are a key factor in their good attitudes to learning.
- Pupils take a pride in their school, are polite and thoughtful and behave well around the school.
- Parents and pupils agree that the school is a safe and secure place to learn. Pupils know how to stay safe, especially when it comes to e-safety.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work well together. Their questioning is effective in helping to check pupils' understanding and pose questions that make pupils think hard about their learning.
- In the Reception class, children get off to a good start and achieve well. Parents appreciate the level of involvement in their children's learning in the early years.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In mathematics, fewer disadvantaged pupils make rapid progress in mathematics compared to their classmates.
- The guidance pupils receive to improve their work in mathematics, especially in their books, does not always match the best practice seen in English. This hampers pupils' ability to improve their work and make even more progress.
- Checks by middle leaders, including subject leaders, on the quality of teaching and learning do not always rigorously address variations between classes. The school has yet to appoint a leader for special educational needs and inclusion to build upon recent improvements introduced under the effective temporary leadership of the headteacher.

Information about this inspection

- Across the school, inspectors observed learning in every year group. Joint observations took place with either the headteacher or deputy headteacher. Pupils' work in books was scrutinised by inspectors and the deputy headteacher. In addition, inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons they visited.
- Inspectors talked to pupils informally and observed their behaviour at playtimes, lunchtimes, as they moved around the school and in lessons. Meetings were held with a group of pupils from Years 2 and 3 and another group from Years 4, 5 and 6. Inspectors listened to pupils read.
- The inspectors met with senior and middle leaders. A group of five governors, including the Chair and Vice-Chair, discussed their work with an inspector. The lead inspector held a telephone call with a representative of the local authority.
- Using the online questionnaire, Parent View, inspectors considered the views of 104 parents. They talked informally to parents throughout the inspection, as well as taking into account an email from one parent. In addition, they scrutinised the responses to the school's own parental survey from November 2014 and notes from a parental forum meeting held during the inspection.
- Staff shared their views informally with inspectors throughout the inspection. Inspectors also took into account their views by analysing the 60 responses to the staff questionnaire received.
- Documents scrutinised by inspectors included records of pupils' standards and progress, the checks carried out by leaders to manage the performance of staff, and information on how the school keeps the pupils safe and secure and promotes attendance.

Inspection team

Jacqueline Marshall, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Peter Thrussell	Additional Inspector
Christine Alexander	Additional Inspector
Roger Blackburn	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average-sized primary school. Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- There are three classes in each year group. Children in the Reception classes attend full time.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is below the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided to give extra support to disadvantaged pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and to children who are looked after.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Secure excellent achievement as a result of outstanding teaching by ensuring that:
 - the guidance pupils receive from staff on how to improve their work, especially in mathematics, is always of the same high quality as in their English books and reflects best practice in the school
 - disadvantaged pupils make the same accelerated progress as their peers in mathematics through even more closely targeted support
 - middle leaders have opportunities to hone their skills in order to check rigorously the quality of teaching and learning in their areas and so raise achievement further
 - the current support for disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and other pupils at risk of not doing well is maintained and then built upon with the appointment of a new leader for this area.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has unswervingly maintained her focus on successfully improving both the quality of teaching and, as a result, the achievement of pupils since the previous inspection. Supported effectively by the deputy headteacher, they have together created a school community committed to the drive for improvement. Staff and governors are unanimously supportive and understand the role they play in achieving this; pupils, too, effectively contribute towards improving behaviour and promoting safety.
- Leaders, governors and staff know what the school's priorities are and how they can help to achieve them. School improvement plans focus precisely on these key priorities needed to make further improvements. Although temporary, the headteacher has successfully risen to the challenge of leading the area of Special Educational Needs until a new leader is appointed.
- Leaders make good use of information on pupils' progress to check how well individuals or groups of pupils are doing. Consequently, they have focused successfully on using additional funding to narrow the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and their peers. They check to make sure additional support is effective in improving pupils' progress. For example, the school has made recent changes to the extra help some pupils receive in mathematics to help them catch up. Whilst proving popular with pupils, this has not yet had time to be reflected in accelerated achievement against national figures.
- The leadership of middle leaders has strengthened since the previous inspection. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have provided guidance and acted effectively as role models to develop other leaders' skills. Through meetings with staff and with senior leaders, middle leaders have developed a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Nevertheless, senior leaders are aware that some middle leaders are keen to develop their skills further.
- Middle leaders are clear that their role is to observe teaching, check the quality of pupils' work, analyse information about pupils' achievement and regularly review their actions. Occasionally, they can be less rigorous in their checks to make sure all staff follow school policies to improve teaching even further. Slight variations occur between classes, for example in the quality of written guidance pupils receive, hampering the drive for improvement. Most middle leaders carry out their roles frequently. A few have had less opportunities, mainly due to restrictions in staffing, hindering their ability to make the same level of impact on outcomes in their areas.
- The range of subjects taught in the school is broad and balanced. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. In order to achieve this, leaders have incorporated the school's use of themes and topics, enriched by 'wow' days, into the new National Curriculum. Pupils say they really like this approach because it makes learning fun. This is a key factor in their good attitudes towards learning.
- Tolerance and respect for others are key features of the school's values. Pupils and parents helped to choose class names to include significant British figures from all cultures and walks of life, such as the scientist Stephen Hawking, athlete Mo Farah, astronaut Helen Sharman, inventor James Dyson and Paralympian Ellie Simmonds. Through subjects and assemblies, leaders provide many opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of life in modern Britain and its values well. Every autumn, all classes focus on electing the school council, learning about the democratic process and its importance in making fair decisions. Equality of opportunity is promoted well across the school.
- The school uses the primary sport funding well. Staff have increased the number of clubs on offer, as well as participation in competitive sports. Specialist sports staff from both the Bexhill Alliance, a local group of schools, and a commercial sports provider have provided training for staff as well as running clubs for pupils. A recent evaluation of the spending by leaders led to a review of how places for clubs are allocated, in order to widen the opportunities they provide to as many pupils as possible.
- A very large majority of parents and all staff agree that leaders ensure pupils are safe and well looked after in school. Child protection and safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.
- The local authority provides a good level of support for the school. Since the last inspection, advisers have supported the school well in developing the quality of teaching, which has led to the improvements in achievement. Training opportunities, such as the recent focus on the teaching of reading, have raised staff expertise and understanding.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has used training and recent appointments to develop and enrich its skills and expertise. The governors use these well to support leaders' work to improve the quality of education at Little Common. Their increased effectiveness has ensured that they not only support, but also challenge, leaders, acting as a useful critical friend and helping to form whole school priorities.

- Governors have a good understanding of how to interpret information on pupils' progress and attainment, compare it to national figures and how to link it to the performance of teachers and the quality of teaching. They have a clear awareness of the quality of teaching and know that the school's procedures to manage staff performance reward good performance and have been successful in tackling any underperformance swiftly. Governors keep a close check on how additional funding is spent to ensure value for money. For example, they regularly check and discuss disadvantaged pupils' progress to ensure the wise spending of funds.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. All staff, pupils and a very large majority of parents agree. Pupils' behaviour around school is very good; pupils are polite, courteous and welcoming to visitors. They take a pride in their school and its surroundings; displays and equipment are well cared for and corridors and playgrounds are free from litter. They move around the school sensibly, even when, at times such as in the lunch hall or playground, there can be large numbers of pupils, because staff set high expectations and pupils know the rules.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Pupils say they enjoy lessons and think that the activities and 'wow' topics that the teachers plan for them make learning interesting. They are keen to improve and work well together in lessons, whether discussing a question posed by the teacher or helping to assess each other's work. They work hard in lessons and produce a good amount of quality work in their books.
- In all classes, from the early years up, pupils are keen to take on responsibilities. These range from helping at snack time, providing ideas for games and friendship during playtimes (the red hats) to helping to sort out minor disagreements using conflict resolution techniques (the blue hats). Staff provide training to ensure pupils have the skills to carry out this work and pupils take the responsibility it brings seriously.
- The school provides considerable support to the very small number of pupils who find behaving well tricky; the school also supports their families. This reflects the school's focus on ensuring everyone has the same chances to develop and achieve well. Other pupils show care and sensitivity towards those pupils who have additional difficulties or find behaving well challenging. All pupils get on well together regardless of their background.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Staff, parents and pupils all agree that pupils are safe.
- Pupils know the school rules and why these are important to keep themselves safe. They explain why there is a 'no running' rule at certain times on the playground, for example to minimise the chances of bumping into each other when it is at its most crowded.
- Pupils understand and can explain the different forms of bullying. They have a particularly good understanding of what cyber bullying is and how to keep safe on the internet. E-safety ambassadors form an e-safety committee, successfully promoting the safe use of the internet to their peers. However, pupils do acknowledge that, very occasionally, pupils can call each other unkind names. They know this is wrong and all agree that staff deal with such instances swiftly.
- Procedures for checking whether adults who work in the school are suitable are good. All staff know what they should do if they have any concerns for the safety of a pupil or colleague. Leaders and governors have had training on safe recruitment practices and understand the risks involved if their checks are not rigorous.
- Attendance is broadly average. The school has had some success in improving the attendance of those pupils with lower than expected attendance. It is committed to continuing its work with them and their families to raise attendance further.

The quality of teaching is good

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have been successful in their drive to eradicate weak teaching and secure good teaching since the previous inspection. As a result, teaching across the school is now good, enabling pupils to make good progress.
- Pupils and staff have very good relationships. Staff have high expectations for pupils' involvement in their learning and manage behaviour well. Pupils are keen to do their best in lessons because of this; they listen carefully to teachers and teaching assistants and work hard. Pupils enjoy the range of subjects and

activities that teachers plan for them, explaining that this is why they like learning so much.

- Teaching assistants play a significant role in pupils' learning. They are well trained and work very effectively in partnership with the teaching staff. In small groups, one-to-one activities or leading learning, they have a good understanding of the next steps that particular pupils need to take. They share information on how well pupils are doing with teachers and, together, help pupils to make good progress.
- All staff use questioning effectively to probe pupils' understanding and provide challenge and support. They make sure the questions they ask require more than just a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Pupils respond in full, adding explanations to back up their answers, because teachers expect this. They are keen to join in discussions because staff have successfully created a culture where pupils are happy to try out their ideas.
- Staff are keen to reflect on how they teach to make sure it is as effective and engaging as possible. Several staff are currently trialling a new approach to teaching whole class reading. They had felt that pupils were less excited and interested as they read and discussed texts in groups. Their latest approach is proving successful, with pupils more enthused by the class texts and the quality of work produced reflecting this.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have focused on improving the guidance pupils receive on how to improve their work. The verbal guidance staff give pupils is very thorough, often given just at the right time to move on learning and is welcomed by pupils. Across subjects this helps pupils to correct mistakes or misconceptions and extend their thinking.
- In pupils' English books, marking is equally helpful. Pupils can point to examples where a comment from the teacher helped them improve their writing or correct their mistakes. In mathematics, the quality of marking in books does not always match that of the verbal guidance in lessons or the best examples across the school. This means that pupils' ability to improve their work and make even more progress is reduced.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Across the school, pupils achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics. Evidence in pupils' work and from both the school's and inspectors' observations demonstrates that pupils make similar good progress in all their subjects. This is as a result of leaders' successful drive to raise achievement since the previous inspection.
- Although they remain broadly average overall, the standards reached by pupils in the national tests at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 have risen steadily year on year over the past years. Increasing numbers of pupils across the school are working at the higher levels expected for their age because teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve have risen.
- In 2014, the proportion of Year 6 pupils reaching the higher level in reading was significantly above the national average. In mathematics, the proportion reaching the highest level was also significantly above the national average. The proportion of Year 2 pupils reaching the higher levels is also increasing.
- In 2014, the proportion of Year 6 pupils making expected progress was significantly above national figures in reading, writing and mathematics. This is an improving picture from 2013 and particularly from 2012 where the progress of some groups was significantly below their peers nationally.
- Work in books, information on pupils' progress and observations during the inspection show that pupils' progress is good across the school. Leaders have worked successfully to raise the overall quality of teaching to good, providing extra support where needed for pupils to catch up.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make similar good progress to other pupils from their individual starting points. This is because the level of support they receive from teachers and teaching assistants is good and staff make sure that the work they provide matches individuals' needs well.
- The gaps between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and their peers in the school have been removed in reading and writing. This is as a result of well tailored support and leaders' careful checks to ensure these pupils achieve as well as others. Gaps in mathematics have also closed, but the proportion of disadvantaged pupils exceeding expected progress is not yet as high as their classmates. Recent changes to the additional support these pupils receive to help them catch up in mathematics have not yet had time for improvements to be reflected in national figures. The school's own checks on progress, however, show an improving picture.
- Gaps in attainment in Key Stage 1 in 2014 between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in school and all pupils nationally are closing. At Key Stage 2, in 2014, a high proportion of the disadvantaged pupils also had special educational needs and this impacted on their attainment overall. Compared to other pupils in school, and nationally, they were two terms behind in reading and mathematics and three terms behind in

writing. However, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school is similar to that of other pupils.

- Children in the early years make good progress in their Reception year, ensuring that they are well prepared for starting in Year 1.

The early years provision

is good

- Children start in the Reception year with skills and understanding that are typical for their age. Improvements in the early years provision have resulted in improving achievement for the last two years. An above average proportion reaches a good level of development, and an increasing proportion exceeds it.
- The early years team provides a stimulating and exciting place to learn. Children are engaged in learning at all times and demonstrate a considerable enjoyment in their learning. They work well together and use their imagination to explore and develop ideas. Just occasionally, opportunities for adults to ask questions to stretch children's knowledge and understanding are missed as children play independently.
- Children know how to behave well because staff set a good example and praise children when they are kind and considerate. Children know how to keep themselves safe, following rules and instructions quickly. Clear expectations are reinforced by all staff and, as a result, children work well together and look after equipment and their classrooms carefully.
- Staff make regular checks on how well children are doing, and use these effectively to plan activities that move children on in their learning. Very good links with parents mean that they too play their part in this process successfully. Parents greatly appreciate the opportunity to share what their children can do at home and use the school's guidance to support their children's learning themselves.
- The early years provision is led well. The leader successfully ensures that there is consistency of practice across the three classes through her regular checks. She evaluates the quality of education provided and takes effective action to bring about improvements. A current focus is the recent appointment of a member of staff with responsibility for the outdoor learning area. This is planned to ensure the children receive the same good level of support and stimulation both indoors and outdoors.

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	114429
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	453689

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	613
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nick Wilkinson
Headteacher	Linda Appleby
Date of previous school inspection	29–30 January 2013
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