

Amherst School

Witches Lane, Riverhead, Sevenoaks, TN13 2AX

Inspection dates 26–27 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Amherst is a happy, exciting and nurturing school of which pupils, staff, governors and parents are rightly very proud.
- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. He has created an exceptionally strong staff and leadership team that share the commitment and determination to provide the best possible learning experiences for the pupils.
- The inspection findings agree with a comment made by a parent that, 'Children are totally involved in their learning and enthusiastic about all that they do. They are valued and challenged.'
- From their above average starting points, pupils make good progress and achieve well. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are significantly above the national average by the time pupils leave at the end of Year 6.
- Teaching is typically good. It is sometimes outstanding and, as a result, pupils make good progress.
- Teachers have high expectations and ensure that pupils enjoy their learning. The rich and varied curriculum meets pupils' needs and their interests exceptionally well.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They have excellent attitudes to learning and enjoy coming to school, as shown in their high attendance.
- Pupils feel very safe, secure and well looked after. They are polite, friendly, confident and articulate. They are respectful of each other and adults. They show understanding, tolerance and acceptance of diversity within the school and beyond.
- The governing body knows the school very well and holds it to account very effectively for its performance.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- More-able pupils do not always make the rapid progress they are capable of. Teachers do not always ensure that these pupils have enough time to complete the challenges that they plan for them.
- Teachers do not always use assessment effectively enough to ensure that work is planned at exactly the right level for pupils of all abilities. As a result, pupils sometimes do not make as much progress as they could.
- Progress in writing has improved substantially but is not yet as good as it is in reading and mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 17 lessons, some jointly with the headteacher. In addition, inspectors talked to pupils about their work, looked at books, listened to some pupils read and observed pupils at break and lunchtimes.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and staff with key leadership responsibilities. Inspectors had discussions with pupils, governors and an external consultant.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents including: leaders' checks on the quality of teaching; the school improvement plan; information on pupils' progress; and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors looked at the 126 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, the school's own survey of parents and one written response. Inspectors had a telephone conversation with a parent and spoke to some parents at the start of the school day.

Inspection team

Margaret Coussins, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Fatiha Maitland

Additional Inspector

Sue Cox

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized junior school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is below average. This is additional government funding for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and for children who are looked after. In 2014, there were too few disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 to report explicitly on their attainment compared with other pupils.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- There is a daily breakfast and after-school club managed by a private provider and therefore not included in this inspection.
- The headteacher was appointed in September 2013.
- The school converted to become an academy school on 1 March 2011. When its predecessor school, Amherst School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be outstanding overall.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching in order to ensure that more pupils make the progress they are capable of, particularly in writing, by making sure that:
 - all teachers consistently make the most effective use of assessment information in order to plan work at exactly the right level for pupils of all abilities
 - the most able pupils have sufficient time to complete the challenging work that teachers plan for them.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher provides outstanding and inspirational leadership. His vision and pursuit of excellence are shared by staff, the governing body, parents and pupils.
- Leaders at all levels, including governors, are united in their determination and commitment to provide the best possible learning experiences for pupils. They have created an exciting, hard-working and motivated school community where a culture of respect, strong values and excellent attitudes prevails.
- Since joining the school, the headteacher, supported very well by the assistant headteacher, has made significant improvements. These have included several new staff appointments, the eradication of any teaching that was typically less than good and a renewed focus on pupils' progress. This demonstrates outstanding leadership and a strong capacity for further improvement.
- The headteacher was quick to identify that, while pupils' attainment remained well above average, pupils' progress was not consistently good enough, especially in writing. He has rapidly raised expectations of pupils' progress and as a result, standards in writing have improved.
- Year group leaders are highly effective. They make sure that pupils' learning is consistent across the three classes. All senior leaders are excellent role models and ensure that expectations are consistently high. Mathematics and English subject leaders tackle weaker teaching successfully. They give effective support and have had a significant impact on improving pupils' progress.
- Judgements on teachers' performance and pay awards are linked to pupils' progress. These shape professional development opportunities provided, based on whole-school priorities and individual needs, including for those who are at the beginning of their careers.
- Staff and governors have a strong commitment to equal opportunities and check that all groups are making at least good progress. They ensure that pupils learn without discrimination. Leaders foster positive relations throughout the school community and beyond.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted exceptionally well, underpinning all that the school does. This is demonstrated in pupils' excellent attitudes to school and their enjoyment of learning. Pupils learn about differences in faiths, cultures and backgrounds.
- In understanding and abiding with the expectations within the school community, pupils understand rules and democratic values in the wider community. The curriculum and the school's values foster a culture of respect and tolerance for all. Pupils are well-prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school provides an exciting, rich and broad range of subjects as well as an excellent range of additional activities. Staff and parents provide a very wide range of high-quality clubs. Music, art, drama, sports and computing have a high profile and pupils enjoy excellent opportunities to use their skills in reading, writing and mathematics across different subjects.
- There are excellent partnerships with other schools. Most notably, the school has strengthened its partnership with the local infant school, which most Amherst pupils attend. This has had a very positive impact in a range of ways. For example, all pupils who start at the school in Year 3 are linked with a buddy in Year 6, which helps to make a smooth and happy transition into Key Stage 2.
- The school works exceptionally well with parents. Parent View and the school's own recent survey show that parents are very positive about all aspects of the school's work. There is a thriving parent and teacher association, which raises considerable sums to fund, for example, the new technology equipment installed in all classrooms.
- The primary sports funding enhances the already strong provision in the school. Funding is used to train staff to teach swimming. As a result, pupils have regular swimming sessions and achieve well. A specialist physical education teacher works with pupils and staff to improve skills and promote active lifestyles.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used very effectively. Eligible pupils benefit from one-to-one support and have opportunities to learn to play a musical instrument. Gaps in achievement between this group and the others have narrowed. Leaders keep a very close check on progress to make sure that extra support is having a positive impact on pupils' achievement.
- Safeguarding arrangements are well-established and are implemented effectively by all staff.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The highly committed governing body has a clear understanding of pupils' progress. Governors provide effective challenge when holding leaders to account for the school's performance. Governors know the school very well, its strengths and areas for further improvement. Governors are very well informed about the school's performance and how it compares to other schools nationally.
 - Governors take an active role in the school. Each year group has a link governor who visits classes and

meets with leaders to gain an insight into pupils' progress. Governors know about the quality of teaching and how any underperformance is tackled. They ensure that pay rewards and promotion are linked to pupils' progress.

- The governing body recently reorganised its committee structure in order to increase its effectiveness, particularly with regard to teaching, learning and its strategic direction. The school benefits from the range of governors' skills and expertise. Governors are fully supportive of the headteacher and have every confidence in his leadership.
- The governing body ensures that safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They behave equally well in lessons, around the school, at break times and during assemblies. Pupils are exceptionally polite, friendly and courteous to each other and to adults. They were very confident and articulate when talking to inspectors about their learning, their school and their aspirations.
- Pupils are excellent ambassadors for their school, of which they are very proud. They have a strong sense of belonging, promoting the school's values exceptionally well.
- Pupils settle quickly to work in lessons and work hard. Pupils work equally hard in lessons and in clubs where they learn new skills and interests. They show great determination and perseverance in all that they do. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in their high attendance.
- A group agreed with a pupil who said that, 'We all behave well because we know what the teachers expect and everyone is kind to each other.' Most parents who responded to Parent View agree that the school makes sure its pupils are well behaved. Instances of misconduct are rare.
- Pupils are proud of the roles they have in school, including as members of the school council and as buddies to pupils in the local infant school. They carry out responsibilities with enthusiasm and dedication, knowing that they make a real difference. They develop their initiative and entrepreneurial skills through many fundraising events for a range of charities.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils say they feel very safe and secure in school at all times and almost all parents strongly agree.
- Pupils understand different kinds of bullying including cyber-bullying and prejudiced-based bullying. They say they are not aware of any bullying in school. They are very confident, however, that if any incidents should arise, their teachers would listen to them, take them seriously and sort things out fairly and quickly.
- Pupils are active in promoting a safe culture in school. For example, pupils create anti-bullying posters to display around the school. One pupil said, expressing the view of many, 'We're not unkind to anyone. We all just play and work together. We're all the same and we don't treat anyone differently.'
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe when online, using computers or mobile phones. They have a clear understanding of potential unsafe situations and are very aware of how to keep themselves safe both in and out of school.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good because it enables pupils to make at least good progress and achieve consistently well. Highly effective actions by the headteacher have successfully improved teaching so that it is now typically good, and sometimes outstanding.
- Teachers ensure that tasks are purposeful and motivating. Teachers carefully plan activities to ensure that pupils make good progress in literacy, reading and mathematics.
- All staff have high expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour. Pupils learn to discuss their ideas and think deeply, especially in response to skilled questioning by adults.
- Pupils in Year 6, for example, had a lively debate comparing films and books. Their writing demonstrated their considered opinions. For example, 'If you watch a film first, it's harder to use your imagination when you read the book' and, 'It can be disappointing to watch a film after you've read the book because things don't always look like you thought they would.' Their discussion helped them make very good

progress in writing a balanced argument.

- Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent and, as a result, pupils work hard, are willing to take risks and want to do well. There is a very strong learning ethos in the school. Pupils are confident to ask if they do not understand, as they know teachers will help them.
- On occasion, although harder work is planned for the most able pupils, they complete the same work as others before moving on to more challenging activities. This means that they do not always have time to complete more demanding tasks. As a result, they do not always make the progress they are capable of.
- Reading is taught well. Teachers ensure that pupils read a good range of authors to promote enjoyment of reading. The school carefully checks the teaching of reading to ensure it consistently promotes high standards and good progress.
- Strong teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants ensures that additional help given to disadvantaged pupils and those who are disabled or have special educational needs supports learning well and promotes good progress.
- Stimulating classrooms and displays of pupils' work in classes and around the school celebrate achievements as well as supporting learning effectively. Teachers and pupils use technology to very good effect to support learning.
- Teachers' marking and feedback give pupils helpful guidance on how to improve their work. Pupils respond with interest to comments and suggestions, and use this guidance well to improve their work. Some teachers use assessment information well to make sure that tasks are pitched at the right level. However, this is not always the case and there are occasions when some pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are significantly above average by the time pupils leave at the end of Year 6. Standards improved from the previous year in the 2014 national tests. This is a result of rigorous checks on the standard of teaching and on pupils' rates of progress.
- Overall progress is good and an increasing proportion of pupils in all groups make better than expected progress, especially in mathematics and reading. However, in 2014, not as many pupils made such rapid progress in writing. Consequently, achievement overall is not yet outstanding.
- Recently, leaders have focused on speeding up pupils' progress in writing. Checks show that it is improving and pupils are making better progress than in previous years.
- Reading for enjoyment is promoted well across the school and many pupils of all ages are fluent, expressive readers. Pupils develop their comprehension and more advanced reading skills well, including the ability to infer and deduce meaning from texts.
- In mathematics the proportion of pupils making better than expected progress is well above average. Nevertheless, there is no complacency and the school is using an increasing range of resources to help further promote pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills.
- Impressive, high-quality standards of work in art and music were observed during the inspection.
- The most able pupils achieve well as expectations are very high. As a consequence, the proportion of pupils who reached the higher levels in 2014 was well above the national figures and most notably so in mathematics.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs across the school successfully meet the challenges expected of them, as their needs are well met. They make similar progress to others, which means that they make at least expected, and sometimes better than expected, progress from their various starting points.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils across the school has improved and they make similar progress to others in reading, writing and mathematics because they receive effective support. In 2014, there were too few eligible pupils in Year 6 to comment on their attainment compared to other pupils.

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	136499
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	449372

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	382
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Hale
Headteacher	Andrew Reid
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01732 452577
Fax number	01732 464007
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