

Halfway Houses Primary School

Southdown Road, Sheerness, Kent, ME12 3BE

Inspection dates 29–30 April 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.

- The headteacher and senior leaders have continued to bring about steady improvements in teaching. This means standards have continued to rise and are now slightly above average.
- Children make particularly good progress in the early years provision. Progress accelerates as pupils move through Key Stage 2. By the end of Year 6 pupils have made good progress from their starting points, particularly in mathematics, reading and more recently in writing. Achievement is good.
- The curriculum provides pupils with very interesting topics to study. They develop their reading, writing and mathematical skills well across a broad range of contexts.
- Teaching is good because teachers are confident in their knowledge of different subjects. Together they develop new approaches which make learning effective. Most teachers have high expectations of the pupils in their class.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes towards learning, their work and each other.
- Around the school pupils are very polite and courteous. They go out of their way to be kind to one another or help anyone who may need it.
- Pupils know a lot about how to keep safe and to think carefully about situations they may find themselves in. They feel safe at school.
- The headteacher has successfully ensured that all senior and middle leaders share the vision for high-quality education. They are effective in bringing about improvements where required. Leaders use the information available to assess the performance of the school accurately.
- Governors make sure that they get plenty of information about all aspects of the school so that they are well informed. They use this to ask challenging questions, alongside the practical support they provide.
- Governors and senior leaders make sure that all the statutory requirements are met and that pupils are kept safe. They check that all staff understand clearly their safeguarding responsibilities and are confident to act if concerned.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Progress is not yet as consistently rapid across Key Stage 1 as it is in the early years provision and in Key Stage 2.
- Teachers do not always expect enough of the most able pupils, particularly in Key Stage 1.
- Improvements in the progress of pupils in English grammar, punctuation and spelling have not been as rapid as in other subjects.
- Not all teachers have implemented the best practice which has been developed in the school.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team visited 34 lessons as well as observing small groups of pupils taught by teaching assistants. Senior leaders from the school accompanied the inspectors on seven of these observations.
- During the inspection, the inspectors reviewed a range of documents provided by the school, including: records of the support given to particular groups of pupils or individuals; teachers' records about the progress and attainment of pupils; plans to bring about improvements; leaders' checks on the quality of teaching; minutes from meetings, including those of the governing body; and evaluations of school by other partners.
- The inspectors met with groups of pupils, middle leaders, senior leaders and with members of the governing body. The lead inspector had a meeting with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors considered the 50 responses to the online survey for parents and carers at the school, Parent View. They also spoke to parents and carers before school, and considered correspondence sent to the inspection team. The inspectors reviewed the 64 responses to a separate survey for staff working at the school.
- The inspection team was accompanied by two shadow inspectors who are training to be inspectors.

Inspection team

Andrew Saunders, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Lynn Lowery

Additional Inspector

Elizabeth Cole

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is larger than the average size for primary schools. There are two classes in most year groups, although there are currently three classes in the Reception class and in Year 6. Children in the Reception classes attend full time.
- Almost all pupils are White British.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is average. However, the proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is higher than average.
- There are slightly more disadvantaged pupils in the school than average. These are pupils who are eligible for free school meals or children looked after. The government provides the school with additional funding to promote the attainment and progress of these pupils, known as the pupil premium grant.
- The school is in the planning stages of building a new school on another site. It is anticipated that the school will move to these new buildings in September 2016.
- The school meets the current floor standards. The government sets out these minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school runs a breakfast club for those who need it.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the rate of progress pupils make in Key Stage 1 by:
 - building more effectively on the good achievement of children when they leave the early years provision
 - increasing teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of doing so that they master the skills they need, particularly in their English grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Make teaching outstanding by:
 - sharing the best practice identified in the school and ensuring teachers put this into action for themselves
 - ensuring teachers provide the most able pupils with work which is even more challenging and expect them to get on with it more quickly.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has maintained a relentless focus on bringing about improvements in teaching. He has developed a strong leadership team who understand well their part in bringing this about. The vision for consistently good quality teaching and high expectations of pupils is shared well across the school.
- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher and the senior leaders have made sure that teachers know precisely what needs to improve, and they follow up to check this is happening. They have tackled weak teaching and lead by example in setting high standards.
- Leadership is not yet outstanding because the progress of pupils is not as rapid in Key Stage 1 as it is in the early years provision and in Key Stage 2, particularly in writing. Teachers have not all been as quick to take on board the best practice which has been developed in the school.
- Leaders at all levels make good use of the information they gather to check which pupils are making the expected progress, and where pupils need to be supported to make even more rapid progress. They share this with teachers and hold teachers to account for this progress. They ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to develop and succeed.
- Together with governors, senior leaders use the information about pupils' performance and the quality of teaching to make appropriate decisions about any additional pay awards. This encourages best practice and tackles any weak teaching. The headteacher inspires adults at the school through positive encouragement and setting ambitious goals.
- The curriculum has been carefully developed to provide pupils with stimulating, relevant topics to study. Middle leaders make sure that pupils have a wide range of experiences. Each topic begins with an exciting starter, and often culminates in a presentation or event run by the pupils for parents and carers. Each term the whole school follows the same 'big idea', which means that learning is shared across year groups; this builds a strong sense of community. The topics are used well to help pupils develop a good understanding of other cultures and life in modern Britain.
- The school promotes tolerance and equality of opportunity. The school's leaders tackle discrimination so that pupils are well prepared to make a positive contribution in the wider world. The school ensures that there are good links with the secondary schools so that pupils are ready for this move and look forward to it eagerly.
- Pupils have similarly good attitudes towards their writing whatever subject they are working in because they do most of their work in their 'One Book'. This ensures they focus persistently on working towards the targets teachers have set for them. Homework is well focused on reinforcing the skills and knowledge pupils are developing.
- The headteacher and leaders make sure that all the necessary policies and procedures for keeping pupils safe are in place and kept up to date. They provide regular training and updates so that staff are confident about their responsibilities in this regard.
- Leaders and teachers frequently listen to what pupils think about their learning and the school, and often take action on their ideas. There are several pupils' committees, including a curriculum committee and a British values committee. The school council visited the Houses of Parliament and reported back to other pupils about this. These opportunities involve lots of different pupils in thinking about these different aspects and help other pupils to broaden their experiences. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is promoted exceptionally well.
- Physical education is also a strength of the school, because leaders have made sure that expert coaching is used to give pupils high-quality teaching. The class teachers observe these lessons so that they increase their own skills and knowledge in this area. Pupils greatly enjoy these sessions and talk very positively about participating in a good range of competitive sports as well as other physical activities.
- The pupil premium funding is used well to improve the achievement of pupils who are eligible. Leaders ensure that these pupils have extra support from adults, get additional resources, or are helped to take part in extra activities which enrich their experiences. Some of these pupils benefit from attending the breakfast club which helps them have a positive start to the day.
- The local authority initially provided an increased level of support following the previous inspection. However, this has diminished as the confidence and effectiveness of the school leadership have become more evident. The headteacher now supports another school which is in special measures. The school often leads new initiatives within the local cluster of schools, particularly developing assessment systems and improving numeracy and science.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors have a very accurate view about the strengths of the school, about how well pupils are performing compared to national figures, and are clear where further improvements need to happen. They visit the school frequently, looking at the learning that is taking place and gathering from staff and pupils their views about the school. They check that the detailed information provided to them makes sense in the light of what they see happening in the school. This gives them a sound basis from which they ask challenging questions. They provide practical support in many ways and find out what parents, carers, pupils and staff think about the school to help them make decisions for the best interests of the pupils and their families.
- Governors make the most of their experience and expertise to ensure that the finances of the school are well managed and give the best value for money. They understand how leaders must take account of the quality of teaching, the performance of pupils and aspects of leadership when making decisions about additional pay awards. This means that underperformance is tackled and the best practice is encouraged.
- The governors are well trained and have a clear understanding about keeping pupils safe. They ensure that policies and procedures are kept up to date and that staff are confident about how to respond to any concerns.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good because pupils know how well they are doing and work hard to produce their best work. They are well motivated to make improvements for themselves, particularly as they get older. By the time they are in Year 6, pupils need only little input from teachers and often given each other feedback or help without being prompted.
- The pupils' involvement in helping choose topics and the engaging curriculum mean pupils enjoy being at school. Attendance has risen in line with national improvements and is average.
- Pupils explained how they have developed a 'growth mindset', where they look at problems or issues as an opportunity to learn something new. The older pupils share this with younger pupils and are always looking for ways to improve their work, with very little prompting. Pupils help to promote the best presentation, because the 'presentation police' award stickers where they come across particularly good handwriting, punctuation and spelling.
- During free time and around the school pupils are very polite and courteous. They are kind to one another and often join together in playing very happily.
- Behaviour is not outstanding because there remain a few occasions when younger pupils need reminders about what is expected of them. Occasionally they become too lively and do not achieve as well as they could when the work is not well structured or lacks challenge. As pupils get older, this is seldom an issue.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say that there is always an adult available whom they can talk to if they are worried about anything. They are also encouraged to discuss any conflicts, and can choose to have an adult listen in to mediate differing opinions.
- Pupils say that bullying of any kind is a very rare occurrence. If it ever does happen, they are confident what they need to do about it, and they say it would be dealt with very quickly. However, parents and carers are not always as well aware of the school's procedures and this causes some anxiety.
- Pupils are particularly well informed about using technology safely, particularly about use of the internet. They have learnt about a range of situations where they need to take care, particularly through the visit of the Life Bus.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers work closely together to develop topics and tasks which are usually well matched to the different needs of the pupils in their classes. Occasionally the work prepared for the most able pupils is not sufficiently challenging, particularly in Key Stage 1.
- Marking has been a focus for improvement. The school's chosen approach is now well embedded and pupils have a good understanding about how to improve their work. Teachers have developed 'halfway huddles' to give pupils the opportunity to think about what they have already achieved, what they still need to achieve, and to give one another helpful feedback. This refocuses their efforts and helps them

make good progress.

- Many teachers have developed 'drop-in zones' in their classrooms, where pupils go if they are really stuck. Often another pupil will then help them to grapple with the concepts they are learning, or they will puzzle it out for themselves. However, not all teachers expect as much of the pupils in their class, particularly in Key Stage 1. After the high expectations in the early years provision, this slows pupils' progress.
- The teaching of phonics (linking letters and the sounds they make) has been a focus for improvement. Adults follow a consistent approach across the school, and standards in reading and spelling are rising. Any pupils who need it are given extra support from volunteers or adults so that they make up ground. However, the sense of urgency is not always as evident as it needs to be for the most able pupils in Key Stage 1 when they cover more complex sounds and letters. The school has made sure that there are good resources for older pupils so that they continue to enjoy their reading. Pupils fill out surveys online about each book they read and this tracks how many words they have read. This sense of competition helps make reading great fun.
- Teaching of literacy and mathematics is effective because teachers share the best ideas and look for ways to put these into action. In particular, teaching of mathematics has improved as the school has ensured there is a strong focus on developing pupils' confidence in mental mathematics and in using practical resources.
- Teachers work together to make sure that the tasks they plan for pupils are appropriate for different abilities. They often expect pupils to choose for themselves which level of challenge they feel confident to tackle. Teachers ask good questions or check on pupils to ensure they have chosen appropriately. They step in to make suggestions if pupils choose work which is too easy or too hard.
- Teachers have had opportunities to observe their colleagues and this helps to ensure that the particular approaches the school promotes are often used very consistently. However, not all teachers have had as much opportunity, particularly to see the very best practice in the school.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- The standards reached at the end of Key Stage 2 have been rising steadily. In 2014, almost all pupils made the expected progress and reached the standards expected for their age. Pupils currently in Year 6 have made even more rapid progress, particularly this year, and are already at the levels expected for the end of the year.
- The rate of progress has been improving, particularly in mathematics and reading, and is good. Progress in writing has also accelerated. However, progress in English grammar, punctuation and spelling has been slower to respond to the school's attempts to bring about improvements. Now that the quality of marking has improved, the work in pupils' books shows that they are beginning to make up ground more quickly in this area.
- After a rapid start in the early years, progress across Key Stage 1 has been slower, particularly in phonics. Although the standards pupils reach at the end of Year 2 have been rising, this has been slow; standards are slightly below average. Fewer pupils than expected are ready to work at the higher levels for their age. However, work in their books shows that progress in reading, writing and mathematics is beginning to improve more quickly as teachers implement more of the changes required and because they have been supported by leaders. A far higher proportion of pupils are on track to meet the standards of the phonics check at the end of Year 1 than previously.
- Disadvantaged pupils who get extra support through the pupil premium funding make at least as good progress as other pupils in the school, and often slightly better. The gap between them and other pupils in the school has been closing steadily. Although there was a larger gap in 2014 than in the previous year, this was a consequence of the particular needs of some of these pupils, compared to others. Overall, this group were slightly more than a year behind other pupils in the school in reading, writing and mathematics. This meant they were also about a year behind other pupils nationally. This year, the pupils who get this support have made up more ground so that they are about a term behind other pupils in reading and writing, and slightly more in mathematics. This shows that they are well placed to be close to other pupils nationally.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress from their starting points. The adults around them consider in detail what their particular needs are and make sure they get helpful support. This means these pupils become much more confident about learning and often need less support as they overcome the issues they face. Teaching assistants who work with specific pupils know a lot about how to help these pupils and ensure they are able to participate fully in the life of the school.
- The most able pupils are often given harder work to do and they make good progress. Occasionally these

pupils are ready to get on with their work but they are expected to sit through more detailed explanations than they need. This limits how much time they have to make progress and do work that is more challenging. In the best examples, teachers set highly challenging work for the most able pupils and expect them to get on with it quickly, with very little initial input. These pupils thrive on this high level of challenge, but this is not always the case, particularly in Key Stage 1.

The early years provision

is good

- Teachers and leaders in the early years provision have worked hard to make the best use of the facilities and resources available to them. They make sure that they use children's interests to promote and develop the skills the children need. Leadership is good and ensures that all adults know what is expected of them and that helpful information is collected about how well children are making progress. This is used to plan further activities and to develop resources.
- Children join the Reception class with skills and knowledge at levels often below those typical for their age, most notably in communication, language and literacy, and in physical development. The adults make sure they quickly settle into the routines of the class and feel very welcome. Learning is very well organised from the start and most children make rapid progress, particularly in their language, reading and writing, as well as their physical development. They are well prepared for the additional challenges of Year 1.
- The introduction of learning outside, especially in the woodland area of the school, has enhanced children's learning and they look forward to these sessions with great anticipation. Children behave very well and their cooperation is exemplary. For example, a large number of children enjoyed working together washing all their bikes, trikes and scooters, accessing the resources they needed with minimal assistance.
- Children have a good understanding of how to think carefully about situations around them and to make careful choices. Along with the safe environment and well-trained adults, this means children feel particularly safe and well cared for.
- Parents and carers say that they appreciate the communication they get from the school and that this helps them understand more about how children learn at this stage of their education.

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	118866
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	462412

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	463
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jane Laker
Headteacher	Ryan Driver
Date of previous school inspection	30 April–1 May 2013
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