

Debden Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Debden, Saffron Walden, CB11 3LE

Inspection dates

13–14 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Early years provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that has serious weaknesses.

- There is no immediate risk to pupils, but the headteacher and governors have failed in their duty to implement safeguarding procedures rigorously. There are serious shortcomings in how information is recorded.
- The headteacher has been too slow in driving improvement since the last inspection. As a result, after three years, teachers are just beginning to make the required changes.
- Pupils are not making good progress in writing across the school. Senior leaders have not been effective in checking that teachers understand how good progress in pupils' writing is measured.
- Teaching requires improvement because targets for teachers and pupils are not sufficiently challenging, expectations are too low and progress is held back.
- Senior leaders do not have rigorous oversight of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Assessment is not accurate and, as a result, the Early Years Foundation Stage requires improvement.
- Self-evaluation is not accurate because school leaders have an over-optimistic view of how well the school is doing. Targets in the school improvement plan are not precise or sufficiently focused on raising pupils' achievement.
- Subject leaders and the new deputy headteacher are very keen to do a good job but are not given sufficient time to carry out their duties effectively.
- The local authority has not given enough support to the school because they have not accurately evaluated its effectiveness.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils love coming to school. They are highly committed to the school and want to do well. As a result, attendance is high, persistent absence is very low and pupils are rarely late for school.
- The school promotes personal values exceptionally well. Pupils' behaviour in class and around the school is good. They have a high regard for each other and for all the adults they work with.
- The Chair of the Governing Body is beginning to make sure that governors understand their role and give a good level of challenge to senior leaders. As a result pupils achieve well in Key Stage 1 and in reading and mathematics in Key Stage 2.
- The school has the capacity to make further improvements because senior leaders and governors have taken effective, although not rapid enough, action to address the issues from the last inspection.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed lessons or parts of lesson in all classes. Some observations were undertaken jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, the local authority, senior and middle leaders, staff, pupils and parents.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents including: pupils' exercise books; achievement and progress information; documents relating to safeguarding; reviews of teaching and learning and school policies and procedures. They listened to pupils read and talk about their work. The lead inspector scrutinised the school's self-evaluation statement, external reports on the school and school action plans.
- The inspection team noted the 27 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. They also spoke to parents in informal meetings. The inspection team took account of the 14 questionnaires returned by members of staff.

Inspection team

Julie Winyard, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ruth Brock

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average primary school.
- Since the last inspection, there have been a number of staff changes. A new deputy headteacher took up her post in January, one teacher left the school and the Early Years Foundation Stage leaders are currently not in school.
- Pupils are mostly of White British heritage.
- Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage in the September before their fifth birthday.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium, which is additional government funding for those eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after and service children's families, is above average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who are from minority ethnic groups is below average as is that of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school has more pupils leaving and joining the school at different times of the year than average.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- As a matter of great urgency ensure that all processes and procedures for safeguarding pupils are effective and meet statutory requirements.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - improvement plans have sharp, time-limited targets, based on accurate self-evaluation and a rigorous focus on raising pupils' achievement
 - teachers have a clear understanding of what good progress looks like in all subjects and set pupils learning targets that are sufficiently challenging
 - subject leaders and the deputy headteacher have sufficient time to monitor and evaluate the quality of learning and progress in their subjects and areas of responsibility across the school
 - the headteacher effectively supports leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage
 - governors are vigilant in checking that all their statutory duties, including ensuring the school website fully complies with government requirements, are met.
- Raise pupils' achievement in writing so that it is consistently good in all subjects by ensuring that teachers:
 - plan interesting writing tasks that challenge and encourage pupils of all levels of ability to do their best
 - have high expectations for the quality of presentation of all pupils' written work
 - make sure the handwriting in all their marking is a model for pupils to follow
 - give pupils sufficient time to reflect on their work before handing it to the teacher to mark
 - give pupils sufficient time to improve work based on written and verbal feedback.
- Ensure that assessment at the start and end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is an accurate evaluation of children's knowledge, skills and understanding.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are inadequate

- Although there is no immediate risk to pupils, the headteacher and governors have not rigorously checked the detail of how incidents relating to pupils' behaviour and safety are recorded. Child protection records are not always dated or signed as required. Incidents on the playground are not always recorded in both the accident and incident books, where appropriate, and parents are not always informed when their child has had an accident at school. Risk assessments, written before pupils go on a visit, are not timely. They are sometimes written the day before, or on the day of, the visit, which does not allow enough time for teachers to check all the possible safety risks. Checks on staff are thorough and meet requirements.
- The headteacher has taken too long to implement the key points for improvement from the last inspection. It is evident from pupils' exercise books that teachers are beginning to apply the new marking policy but not all pupils are given enough time to make the improvements to their work that teachers recommend.
- The school's self-evaluation is too generous and is not based on secure evidence of the effectiveness of the school. The school improvement plan does not identify the key issues that will help the school to improve. Targets are not clear and it is difficult for leaders and governors to measure the impact of actions taken, for example whether they are improving pupils' achievement.
- The headteacher monitors teaching and learning as part of performance management and teachers have targets to improve pupils' achievement linked to salary increases. However, targets are not challenging enough and, as a result, do not have the impact necessary to ensure rapid school improvement.
- Senior leaders have not made sure that teachers understand what good progress means. Records of pupil-progress meetings indicate that teachers do not have an accurate view of how well pupils are doing compared to similar pupils and to all pupils nationally.
- The new deputy headteacher has a very clear idea of what she must do to improve pupils' learning and progress. However, as she is teaching a class for four days a week, she does not have time to put these ideas into practice.
- Subject leaders have a good understanding of what they must do to improve pupils' achievement in their subjects. However, they are not given sufficient time outside the teaching of their own classes to regularly check learning and teaching or to carry out rigorous scrutiny of pupils' work in their subjects across the school.
- The local authority has not monitored the school well enough. Their representative has visited the school but has failed to recognise weak progress in writing across the school. Reports of visits tend to focus on teachers' marking, are bland in tone and do not give sufficient challenge to school leaders or governors.
- Senior leaders and governors have taken effective action to address the issues from the last inspection. However, it has taken too long to do so. The governors are aware of this and under the leadership of the Chair of the Governing Body have ensured that marking has improved and teaching assistants are used effectively in all lessons. They are driving for further improvement, particularly in pupils' achievement in writing.
- The school promotes equality of opportunity well and, as a result, the large proportion of pupils who come from the local army barracks do as well as other pupils in the school. The pupil premium is used effectively to make sure disadvantaged and service family pupils get the extra help they need when they arrive at the school at short notice. Parents highly value the good-quality support they get when one parent is on active duty in dangerous environments.

- Pupils are very enthusiastic about the many sports they are able to take part in. The school uses the sports premium well to provide a wide range of sports. Most pupils take up the opportunity to learn and play different sports. They also value the additional coaching the school provides.
- The curriculum is interesting and varied and takes account of pupils' interests as well as broadening their understanding of the world. However, some themes are taught better than others and work on the walls and in pupils' books shows a varied picture of how well pupils apply their reading, writing and mathematics skills through the different topics. For example, the quality of pupils' writing in some topics is excellent while in others it is poor.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. British values are promoted effectively across different subjects, in teachers' and school leaders' high expectations of how pupils behave towards each other and in their active support for the local and wider- world community. For example, they have recently raised money for earthquake survivors. The school council takes a very active role in all aspects of school life. Its members are democratically elected by their classmates and teachers and senior leaders value and act upon their suggestions.
- Pupils' cultural development is effectively supported through opportunities to learn a musical instrument and take part in the school orchestra and choir. Pupils also enjoy weekly dance lessons – from hip-hop to classical dance. There is a high take up for all these extra activities.
- There is good liaison between the school and the two main secondary schools that Year 6 pupils move on to. Secondary teachers visit pupils at Debden and there is a range of opportunities for pupils to visit their new secondary school.

■ The governance of the school:

- governance has improved considerably since the appointment of the Chair of the Governing Body. She has a clear and accurate view of the priorities for school improvement and is beginning to empower all members of the governing body to challenge school leaders to explain why improvement has been slow since the last inspection.
- governors are beginning to have an understanding of the extent of their role and responsibilities but weaknesses in their monitoring remain. For example, they have not checked how safeguarding issues are recorded and the school website is not fully compliant with government requirements.
- the Chair of the Governing Body has been trained in how to understand pupil performance data and has arranged similar training for all the governors to sharpen their ability to challenge senior leaders.
- governors make regular visits to the school and are full of praise for the strong values it promotes. However, not all have the knowledge to recognise underachievement in writing or challenge this when they write their reports to the governing body.
- governors are involved in the performance management of the headteacher but until recently have lacked the knowledge to be able to set challenging targets for school improvement. They are informed and appropriately consulted about teachers' performance management.
- governors have checked that pupil premium and sports premium are used effectively. They are clear about the impact this additional funding has on supporting pupils when they first arrive at the school and on pupils' enthusiasm for, and skills in, different sports.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They behave well in lessons and around the school due to the good provision for their spiritual, moral and social development. The strong values of the school are lived out daily by the pupils in the care and consideration they show for each other and for all the adults they work with.
- Pupils are encouraged to be imaginative and creative. They are able to reflect on their behaviour and take responsibility for their actions. However, they are not always given sufficient opportunities to reflect on their work in lessons or to think about how they could improve before teachers mark their work.

- Pupils take an active part in helping others in school and in the wider community. Older pupils love their 'special jobs' and talk with great enthusiasm about being a 'buddy' for a Reception child.
- Older pupils are keen to help all pupils play well together and value their role as play leaders. They are also enjoying the new role of sports leader. Not all the 'special jobs' are quite so pleasant. One Year 5 girl spoke enthusiastically about helping Reception children scrape their plates after lunch. 'It's great having the rubber gloves and the apron but I'm not so keen on "the spatula of doom". It's a bit yucky!'

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure requires improvement. Although pupils are happy in this friendly and secure environment, they are not always cared for as well as possible. There is appropriate supervision at break times and this was evident during the inspection, but there are too many minor accidents. For example in April this year, 39 accidents were recorded in the accident book, some of which appear to be caused by too much excitement or 'rough' play. Accidents and incidents are not recorded appropriately.
- Pupils say they feel very safe at school and this is evident in their confidence when talking to adults about their school. They say there is no bullying in the school and are confident to talk to an adult if there are any problems.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and electronic devices. They are clear that the school blocks certain websites and that they learn about the danger of social media.
- Most parents think their children are safe and well cared for. They are very pleased with how well pupils from the army base fit in and how families are welcomed into the school community. A very small minority of parents are concerned about bullying but there was no evidence of pupils being concerned when they spoke to inspectors.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Pupils are keen to learn in lessons because teachers are enthusiastic, have good subject knowledge and make learning interesting.
- Teachers use a range of teaching approaches which meet the learning needs of most pupils. They are keen for pupils to be able to learn on their own. When this is planned well, pupils make good progress in the lesson, for example, in a lesson where pupils were learning about a new touch-screen tablet application (APP). The teacher was extremely skilful at knowing when to stop showing the pupils what to do and let them explore the APP themselves.
- When learning is less effective, teachers plan well and use appropriate resources but do not observe closely enough how learning is going. For example, in a mathematics lesson pupils had very useful resources to help them to add three numbers together, however the pupils relied on the resources rather than using their good mental mathematics skills. This slowed down their learning.
- Overall, mathematics is taught well as is evident in pupils' achievement at the end of Year 2 and Year 6.
- The teaching of writing is not consistently good through the school. Pupils do not get enough opportunities to use their writing skills in other subjects, for example, in history.
- Teaching assistants have a good understanding of how to support pupils' learning in lessons. Governors have used financial resources well to make sure teaching assistants arrive in class half an hour before the pupils. This enables the teacher to give them a full briefing about the learning for the day and the groups or individuals they are working with.

- Marking of pupils' work is mostly good because all teachers are implementing the school's agreed approach to marking. However, teachers do not always write their comments neatly or insist on high standards of presentation. As a result, some pupils' books are not presented well and some work is scruffy and untidy. Pupils are not given sufficient time to make the changes teachers recommend to improve their work.
- Teachers assess pupils' work accurately in Key Stages 1 and 2. However, they have misunderstood what good progress over time looks like and, as a result, pupils' targets are not sufficiently challenging.
- Reading is taught effectively from when children start in Reception. Pupils use their phonic knowledge and skills (sounds and corresponding letters) well in the early stages of learning to read. By Year 6, pupils are avid and enthusiastic readers. One pupil said, 'Who needs television when you have one of these' – holding up a favourite reading book.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils achieve well in Key Stage 1. By the end of Year 2 they are achieving better than other pupils of their age in reading, writing and mathematics. There is no gap in achievement between minority ethnic pupils, disadvantaged pupils, service family pupils (those eligible for the pupil premium) and other pupils in the school.
- Most able pupils achieve well in Key Stage 1 because teachers make sure they have work that makes them think hard. They are able to apply their skills in more challenging situations.
- Pupils achieve well by the end of Key Stage 2 in reading and mathematics. However, the changes of teacher some classes have experienced have had an adverse impact on their learning. As a result, progress is not consistently good from Year 3 to Year 6. The school's information on progress and attainment indicates that pupils catch up well in Year 6 and are on track to do better than last year.
- Pupils did not achieve well in writing in 2014. They made significantly less progress than all pupils nationally. This is because middle ability and the most able pupils did not make enough progress throughout Key Stage 2. Patchy progress was also evident when inspectors scrutinised pupils' writing in English and other subjects across the school.
- There were too few disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 in 2014 to report their attainment compared with that of other pupils without identifying individuals. However, disadvantaged pupils and service family pupils currently achieve as well as others of their age in Key Stage 2.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make similar progress compared to that of other pupils in the school – from their starting points. Teachers understand their learning needs and use a good range of support programmes to help them learn well.

The early years provision

requires improvement

- Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage requires improvement. Both leaders are currently away from the school and the headteacher has not identified who will lead this provision. Neither the headteacher nor the deputy headteacher have senior leadership oversight of the quality of education that children receive.
- Current assessment underestimates the abilities of the children when they start at the school. Most have attended one of the two nurseries in the village. However, school data indicate that over half the children started school in September 2014 with skills and abilities similar to those of an average two to three year old. This is not an accurate reflection of the lively, articulate and keen-to-learn children the inspection team met in the Reception classroom.

- Assessment of children's attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2014 is too high. Accurate Year 1 assessment of the children who completed their Reception Year last July indicates that about half of them are not as far ahead with their learning as the Early Years Foundation Stage assessment suggested. The 'learning journeys' used to support this assessment are messy and do not show clear progress from children's starting points. A new system of mathematics and literacy books, recommended by the school's external consultant, was implemented in January 2015. These are a much more effective record of the good progress children are currently making, especially in their literacy and mathematical skills.
- The quality of teaching in the Reception class is currently good. Teaching plans address all the areas of learning over the term. Activities are carefully selected to match the current theme and these are evident inside and outside the classroom. Children respond well to the good variety of learning opportunities. They concentrate hard and do not flit from one activity to another. The focused adult-led sessions ensure that children learn the basic skills they need to be ready to start Year 1.
- The teaching assistant supports specific activities well because the teacher explains what is required. However, additional questions to move learning forward, when children are ready for more challenging activities, are not always provided.
- Activities planned recognise and respond to children's interests. This is evident in the recent butterfly project where children were fascinated to learn about the life-cycle of the butterfly at first-hand. One child's eyes lit up as he explained how he watched pupae hatch, 'They all came out together!' he gasped.
- Children feel safe and happy in this friendly and well-managed learning environment. As a result, they behave well and follow adult directions quickly and enthusiastically. Noise levels are occasionally a little high and children respond very well to 'turning down their volume a notch', when reminded of this by an adult.
- Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage are safe in their setting despite the school's weaknesses in safeguarding procedures.

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	115128
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	461667

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	127
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ursula Lyons
Headteacher	Julie Gibbons
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2012
Telephone number	01799 540302
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