

The Wells Free School

Mount Ephraim, Tunbridge Wells, TN4 8AT

Inspection dates 19–20 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	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 has a very clear vision for pupils' education. She is fully supported by other leaders, governors and staff to make the vision a reality. Together, they ensure that teaching and pupils' achievement are good.
- Governors are effective. They help set the strategic direction of the school and hold leaders to account robustly.
- The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have very good relationships with pupils and know each individual very well. They have high expectations and so challenge pupils of all abilities. They plan work that is relevant to pupils and builds well on what they already know.
- Pupils achieve well. The majority make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils attain levels that are above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils reach high standards in other subjects such as music and French.
- The curriculum at the school has many strengths. Leaders ensure that enrichment activities engage pupils' enthusiasm and commitment to their learning.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is very well developed. They are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They conduct themselves very well around the school and look after one another. Inclusion is at the heart of all of the school's work and so pupils add to the strong family ethos that has been created.
- Pupils feel safe at the school. Leaders make sure that systems for safeguarding pupils are robust and effective.
- Provision in the early years is good. Teachers adapt provision effectively to meet the needs of the pupils at the school. Pupils often leave Reception with a good level of development.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Leaders' analysis of the school's performance is not always coordinated as well as it could be. This means, at times, leaders duplicate each other's work and too much relies on the headteacher.
- A few pupils do not show consistently positive attitudes to learning.
- In the early years, the use of assessment is not rigorous enough to ensure all pupils make rapid and sustained progress.
- Teachers' feedback does not always help pupils to improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 17 lessons across a range of subjects, as well as an assembly. Four lessons were observed with the headteacher. The inspectors observed playtimes and pupils' behaviour around the school. They talked with pupils, analysed their work, and listened to some pupils read.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, subject leaders and four members of the governing body, two of which were part of the forming group for the free school. The lead inspector spoke to a representative from the local authority and a representative from the Department for Education on the telephone.
- Inspectors looked closely at school documentation, including minutes of governing body meetings, the school's analysis of how well it is doing, its improvement plan and reports from the headteacher to the governing body. Inspectors also reviewed the school's own data about pupils' current achievement.
- Inspectors took account of 55 responses from parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View. They also had informal conversations with parents at the end of the school day. The inspectors analysed 17 responses to the staff questionnaire provided by Ofsted.

Inspection team

Matthew Barnes, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Clive Close, Team inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Wells Free School is smaller than average. The school was opened in September 2013. There are currently four classes from Reception to Year 3. Children in Reception attend full time. The school will continue to grow by adding a new class each year when a new cohort joins in Reception. This will continue until the school becomes an all-through primary school.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium, which is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after, is well below average.
- The vast majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above the national average.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and pupils' achievement so that they are outstanding by ensuring that:
 - leaders' work is more carefully planned and shared to make the best use of their time and actions to improve the school are precisely targeted
 - pupils consistently show positive attitudes to their learning
 - staff in the early years make better use of assessment to ensure all pupils make rapid and sustained progress
 - teachers' feedback consistently helps pupils to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, through her strong vision and determination to succeed, provides effective leadership at the school. She has brought the whole school community together to work towards making the four guiding principles of 'well-being, community, purposeful learning and inclusion' a reality. As a result, teaching and learning are good and there is a strong family ethos running through all aspects of the school's work.
- Leaders undertake a number of useful activities to monitor the performance of the school. For example, the headteacher observes teaching regularly and gives teachers useful feedback about how they can improve their practice. Systems for tracking and analysing pupils' progress are robust and useful. Senior leaders use this information to compare and analyse what they see in the school. At times, however, these activities are not sufficiently planned and coordinated to ensure leaders do not duplicate what has already been done. Too much relies on the skills and direction of the headteacher.
- The strong desire to be an inclusive school means that equal opportunities are effectively promoted throughout the work of the school. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. As a result, senior leaders have ensured that all groups of pupils are now making good progress.
- Leaders make good use of what they know about the school to plan broadly how they will improve the school in future. For example, they rightly identified the need to improve writing and phonics teaching when analysing the performance of the school. The teaching of writing and phonics is now effective.
- The leadership of special needs provision is good. The relatively new special educational needs coordinator already knows the pupils on the special educational needs register well and how they are progressing. Her plans for improving provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are well developed.
- Senior leaders' development of 'faculty' leaders to lead groups of subjects has been effective. They are already carrying out useful activities to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility. At times, however, the activities they are doing are not as well planned as they could be. This means they sometimes repeat activities that have been undertaken by senior leaders and do not make the most of the opportunities they are given. Nevertheless, the approach has already helped improve standards in a number of subjects, such as music, modern foreign languages and art.
- The school's curriculum promotes creativity and personal development effectively. Leaders ensure that pupils regularly benefit from enrichment activities that secure their interest and enthusiasm. Pupils learn about topics that are relevant to their locality. Leaders also ensure that pupils benefit from the specific skills of the teachers that work at the school. For example, all pupils receive very high quality French teaching and achieve particularly well.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is also developed effectively. For example, a Year 3 lesson on Judaism enabled pupils to understand differences in cultural beliefs. They demonstrated a strong sense of spirituality in their discussions about why Jewish people 'treasure their books' when discussing arks kept in temples. As a result, pupils have a well-developed understanding of the cultural diversity of the country. British values are promoted effectively through exciting initiatives such as the 'headteacher for a day' election.
- Leaders' use of the pupil premium grant has been effective. They tailor the use of the grant to meet the needs of the individual pupils who are eligible for the support. For example, they have ensured that eligible pupils have had free access to the wide array of clubs and extra-curricular activities that are on offer, such as ballet club. Information the school keeps to analyse the use of the grant demonstrates that pupils are benefitting in a number of ways. Leaders have started to narrow the gap in attainment of these pupils effectively.
- Leaders' use of the sport premium funding has been very effective. Pupils receive high quality physical education lessons from specialist coaches. Teachers benefit from working alongside these coaches to help them to develop their own expertise. The school has also ensured that it is well resourced so that pupils have access to a range of skills and sports in these sessions. Pupils make at least good progress in physical education as a result.
- Leaders have made effective use of external support to help them successfully open the school and improve provision. They have received useful advice from the local authority and from an adviser from the Department of Education. For example, leaders now use data about pupils' progress effectively following advice received externally. The headteacher also ensures that staff have access to training provided by Kent County Council to help them improve their practice.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. All statutory requirements are met.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors play a pivotal role in setting the strategic direction of the school. They have worked closely with the headteacher to create the guiding principles which are used to form and set policy. They hold leaders to account rigorously to ensure that the vision is realised. Minutes of governors' meetings demonstrate that they ask pertinent questions about the running of the school. This means that they know how well pupils are achieving at the school and where there are strengths in teaching, as well as areas for development. They have been proactive in ensuring that school policies promote safety and meet statutory regulations, for example by commissioning an audit of safeguarding at the school. Governors contribute effectively to a number of monitoring activities, for example by regularly visiting the school to see it at work. This has led to leaders making rapid changes to improve how funding is used, such as improvements made to the use of the sport premium funding.
- Governors make sure that performance management policies and procedures are robust. Leaders ensure that staff are held to account for the progress of pupils. Governors monitor how good performance is rewarded effectively. Any performance that does not meet the high expectations of the headteacher and governing body is challenged and tackled effectively.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good because pupils are keen to learn and conduct themselves well.
- Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is very good. There is a very strong sense of community at play and at lunchtimes. Staff regularly join the pupils at these times to share in their play, lead activities and talk to the pupils while they are eating. Pupils play well together and enjoy the positive family ethos that has been nurtured.
- In the majority of classes and lessons, pupils demonstrate good attitudes to their learning, listen well to the teachers and persevere with their work. Relationships are positive and pupils enjoy their learning. They show respect for the school and towards each other.
- A few pupils do not, however, show the same level of commitment to their work in all classes, particularly when working with different adults. At these times, staff still have to work hard to ensure that these pupils remain focused on their work.
- Incidents of poor behaviour are extremely rare. Leaders rightly celebrate the very positive contribution pupils make to the school. Pupils themselves believe behaviour has improved over the last two years. They have rightly identified that staff at the school care for them. This is particularly noticeable at playtimes and lunchtimes. This helps cultivate the strong family ethos of the school.
- There have been no fixed-term or permanent exclusions.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good because the headteacher, ably supported by the governing body, has ensured staff see it as a priority.
- Leaders have taken effective action to make sure that pupils are safe during the time the school remains within a building site. Risk assessments are appropriately used to ensure safety on trips and visits.
- Staff have completed the appropriate training so that safeguarding arrangements are robust. There are good partnerships between the school and other agencies.
- Pupils demonstrate that they have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They are aware of how to keep themselves safe in some contexts, including when using the internet. Leaders have rightly identified the need to do more to develop pupils' understanding of how to assess risk for themselves.
- Pupils report that there is no bullying at the school, and this is reflected in the school's logs. Pupils feel safe. Parents have no concerns about the safety of their children at the school.
- Pupils' attendance has improved and is now at least in line with the national average. The school has reduced persistent absence effectively. Leaders work proactively with families to help improve pupils' attendance.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The quality of teaching is consistently good across the school and sometimes better. Pupils achieve well because all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. This means that lessons are challenging and enjoyable for pupils. Relationships are positive and pupils often want to do their best as a

result.

- Teachers make good use of what they know about pupils to plan work that challenges pupils of all abilities. This is also the case during lessons where teachers use regular 'pit stops' to assess how well pupils are learning and amend tasks as necessary to accelerate pupils' progress.
- Pupils are encouraged to self-select tasks to develop their learning as well as their independence skills. This is better developed in some classes than others. Where this works well, pupils take ownership of their learning and make a great contribution to the progress they are making.
- The teaching of reading is good. School leaders have worked hard to improve how pupils are taught to use phonics (the link between letters and their sounds) to read. Pupils are taught according to their ability, rather than their age. As a result, pupils of all abilities apply what they know when reading unfamiliar words. Pupils are now making much better progress in their phonics as a result.
- The teaching of writing is effective. New initiatives have been introduced to help pupils develop their enthusiasm for writing. As a result, pupils of all abilities enjoy writing for a variety of purposes and make good progress in their writing.
- The teaching of a number of other subjects is of a very high quality. For example, teaching in music, French and religious education is notably strong. Much of what pupils learn is directly related to their local heritage. This helps them develop a strong cultural understanding.
- The use of technology in teaching and learning is effective. Pupils have regular access to tablets to help them learn. For example, pupils were seen using these to help them create an animated film linked to what they have been studying. Pupils showed very high levels of competence for their age and enjoyed what they had been asked to do.
- Mathematics is taught well. Teachers ensure that pupils experience mathematical concepts in a range of ways to help them with their understanding. For example, in a Year 3 lesson about data handling, the teacher used practical apparatus for the pupils to explore different ways that data can be presented. This allowed them to make rapid progress in their understanding of graphs. Other pupils were asked to read and interpret data presented in a range of forms, which they found challenging and enjoyable.
- More-able pupils are consistently challenged across the school. This is because all staff have very high expectations about what these pupils should achieve. More-able pupils respond well to the challenge they are given, even when, at times, they struggle to understand what they have been asked to do. More often, they make very good progress because they are encouraged to solve problems independently and have developed good attitudes to their learning.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils in all three key stages make good progress from their different starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. They also make good progress in a number of other subjects, including music, French and physical education.
- In 2014, the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development when they left Reception was above the national average. Current school data show that the proportion looks likely to be much higher in 2015.
- Pupils did not do as well in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2014 and achieved results that were below the national average. However, current school data demonstrate that a much higher proportion look likely to achieve the expected level this year.
- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2014 was above average in reading and mathematics, and broadly average in writing. Current school data demonstrate that results in writing will be much higher this year, with a much higher proportion achieving the higher level.
- Evidence seen in pupils' books shows why more pupils are likely to achieve higher results this year. Pupils make good and sometimes rapid progress in their writing. There remain some areas of weakness that the school has rightly identified, such as grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- Pupils are regularly given opportunities to apply what they have learnt in English and mathematics in other subjects. For example, pupils are given good opportunities to write in science and history.
- Different groups in the school make similar progress to each other. For example, girls and boys make similar progress. The only exception is disadvantaged pupils, who are now making more rapid progress than their peers, particularly in reading, and so the gap between their attainment and that of their peers is closing. The cohort who completed their end of Key Stage 1 assessments in 2014 were approximately a term and a half behind their peers nationally and just under two terms behind their peers in school in reading. They were just over a term behind their peers nationally and in the school in writing and about two terms behind their peers nationally and in school in mathematics.

- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress from their starting points. Leaders have worked hard to ensure individual pupils' needs are met. This has ensured that each pupil is very well provided for.
- More-able pupils often make very good progress. They are regularly challenged and respond well to the high expectations of staff. As a result, many are working at levels much higher than would normally be expected for their age.

The early years provision

is good

- Provision in the early years is effective because children benefit from enticing and stimulating activities that support their development in all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.
- Children take part in purposeful and engaging activities, including when having choices about what they are learning. Teachers make good use of questioning to challenge children's thinking and deepen their understanding. As a result, children make good progress in the Reception year.
- Children come into Reception with a wide variation in the skills typical for their age. While some come in with much higher-level skills than is typical, a significant proportion enter the school with levels that are much lower. Nevertheless, the proportion leaving Reception with a good level of development was above average in 2014.
- Work in children's journals and their achievement in lessons show they make good progress from their starting points. Current school data demonstrate that even more children are on track to reach a good level of development in 2015.
- At times, teachers' use of assessment is not effective enough to ensure that all children make rapid and sustained progress in all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. Assessments do not always capture the key developmental moments for children and are not systematically included in the children's journals.
- There are very effective links between staff and parents. Parents make regular contributions to the school's information about how well their child is doing. They are able to join in sessions first thing in the morning and see how well their pupils are doing.
- Relationships between staff and children are strong. Children play, learn and mix together very well. For example, during a mathematics lesson the children were successfully working in teams of three. They listened well to each other and valued the contributions that each member of the group made. Children behave well in lessons and around the school and make a positive contribution to the family ethos of the school. They are well prepared when moving into Year 1.
- The leadership and management of the early years are good. Leaders have ensured that through their evaluations they have amended their provision to meet the varying needs of the cohorts that come into the school. For example, this year there is a much greater proportion of girls in the cohort. Leaders, therefore, have a good understanding of the effectiveness of provision in the early years and so plans for improvement are well targeted. Leaders and staff ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for.

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	139696
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	450287

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4–8
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	95
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jude O'Connor
Headteacher	Mrs Ani Lawrence
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01892 739075
Email address	office@thewellsfreeschool.co.uk

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