

Hormead Church of England (VA) First School

Great Hormead, Buntingford, SG9 0NR

Inspection dates 23–24 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	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.

- Leadership and management are good. Plans for improvement have been implemented relentlessly and rigorously, which has been pivotal in moving the school from inadequate to good within 18 months.
- Leaders' strong capacity for continuing improvement shows in their success in addressing all previous weaknesses and their refreshing ambition for the school to be as good as, or better than, any other.
- The school's strong ethos promotes fundamental British values such as tolerance and fairness. Pupils readily accept and respect diversity.
- Staff communicate high expectations for pupils' conduct and work ethic, to which pupils respond positively.
- Behaviour is good in all classrooms and outside play areas.
- Pupils are kept safe and they are well cared for. They say that they feel safe and their parents agree.
- Teaching is good because teachers soak up advice from the headteacher, each other and professionals beyond the school. They act upon it readily to accomplish good and occasionally outstanding practice.
- Pupils of all ages achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards are rising rapidly and they are above average in Key Stage 1. Writing, previously a weakness, is a significant strength in all age groups.
- Children in the early years make good progress from their individual starting points. The early years provision prepares them well for future learning in Year 1.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Provision in the early years is sometimes too formal for the youngest children.
- Pupils are only just beginning to learn how to persevere with difficult work and rely less on adult support.
- Arrangements for tracking the progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are not sharp enough.
- Teaching in other subjects is not all of the same high standard as that in literacy and numeracy.

Information about this inspection

- Her Majesty's inspector (HMI) made three monitoring visits to the school prior to this inspection. Evidence from these visits was taken into account.
- HMI gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching and learning over time. This included six observations of parts of lessons taught by class teachers and teaching assistants, and shorter visits to classrooms. Some lessons were seen together with the headteacher.
- The inspector looked at pupils' written work in exercise books, examples of work on display, teachers' case studies of individual pupils, and the school's latest information about teaching and achievement.
- A few pupils in Key Stages 1 read to the inspector and talked to her about their books. The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) was observed.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, pupils, all of the teaching staff, a representative from the local authority and members of the governing body.
- HMI observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents, including information about pupils' attendance and behaviour, plans for future improvement, self-evaluation and minutes of meetings held by the governing body. Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils and arrangements for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs were examined.
- The views of the 27 parents who responded to a recent school survey were taken into account, as there were too few respondents to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View, to generate any data. In addition, HMI talked to parents informally in the playground. Responses from nine members of staff to Ofsted's staff questionnaire were also considered.

Inspection team

Linda Killman, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than average for schools of the same type.
- From September 2014, the school's status changed from a primary school (4–11 years) to a first school (3–9 years). All pupils currently in Year 4 are transferring to middle school in September 2015.
- Numbers in each year group are very small, with two year groups in each of the three classes.
- In the early years, children attend part-time from the term after their third birthday. Children in Reception attend full-time unless they have significant physical or learning needs, where a planned, phased introduction is more appropriate.
- Most pupils are White British and very few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the pupil premium provides support is well below the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and for children in local authority care.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs is average.
- The previous headteacher left soon after the last inspection in February 2014. Ever since, temporary arrangements have been in place. This term, the governing body appointed a permanent headteacher to lead the school from September 2015. Staff turnover has been much higher than usual over the past 18 months.
- A private day nursery is located on the school site. It is not managed by the governing body and is subject to separate inspection arrangements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching by:
 - extending the best practice in literacy and mathematics across all other subjects
 - building pupils' resilience in tackling work that stretches them
 - developing provision in the early years, especially for Nursery-aged children, by extending opportunities for children to explore, experiment, make choices and discover through play.
- Improve assessment practice for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs by:
 - ensuring that the special needs coordinator is suitably trained to develop existing provision and improve systems for tracking pupils' progress accurately
 - breaking down, into smaller steps, the statutory curriculum expectations for achievement in the early years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership and management are good. In partnership, the headteacher and governors have pressed ahead relentlessly to improve the quality of teaching and other provision. The impact of their continuous push to move the school forward is evident in the good progress that most pupils are making and, consequently, rapidly rising standards, especially in writing. Ambition for the school to be recognised locally as one of the best has been ignited across the school community.
- The headteacher's clear direction and high expectations generate strong teamwork and a shared determination to achieve the challenging goals outlined in the school's plan of action. Secure systems for checking the school's progress towards its targets have proved useful in keeping track of what is and what is not working well so that adjustments can be made, if needs be. Good quality training for staff, including coaching, mentoring and visits to good schools, has been pivotal in raising the quality of teaching and learning.
- Subject leaders make a useful contribution to curriculum planning and the transition to the new national curriculum has been managed well. While individual teachers' specialist skills are used to good effect, all teachers assume responsibility for curriculum development for the age ranges that they teach. This has proved an effective strategy for this small school.
- With support from the headteacher, improvements have been made by the special educational needs coordinator, particularly in advising staff on what pupils find most or least difficult and how they prefer to learn. Staff are therefore in a better position to adapt their teaching to meet pupils' individual learning needs and the progress made by disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is gathering speed. However, the arrangements for tracking the progress of these pupils require improvement.
- Revisions to the curriculum have been successful in raising standards in literacy and mathematics, especially with adjustments to the timetable allowing sufficient time for the teaching of phonics (letters and sounds) and writing. The curriculum has been injected with more opportunities for enrichment that reflect pupils' interests and this has increased their motivation to learn.
- Working closely with other local schools and the local authority, the school is well on its way in developing its preferred assessment practice following the removal of national curriculum levels.
- Promotion of fundamental British values through the curriculum and the school's strong ethos contribute to pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Every pupil is valued as an individual through staff and governors' active promotion of equality of opportunity and inclusion. Pupils develop as tolerant, considerate and respectful young people, prepared positively for future life in modern Britain.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and are effective. For example, e-safety is covered suitably in the curriculum and reinforced on a daily basis; potential risks and hazards are assessed comprehensively for on- and off-site activities. Staff are alert to any signs of abuse and know how to report concerns; procedures to make referrals to external agencies are comprehensive.
- Leaders are adept at making small amounts of funding go far. The pupil premium has been used to good effect to support those pupils for whom it is intended. Similarly, the sport premium funding is enabling more pupils than ever before to participate in physical activities and, particularly, to take part in inter-school competitive sports.
- The very large majority of parents are supportive of the school and pleased with their children's education and welfare. The general consensus of opinion is that communication with parents is open and productive. Parents receive termly charts that show how well their children are progressing in reading, writing and mathematics.

- The local authority monitors the school's work closely. It has provided extensive guidance and support with the teaching of literacy and mathematics, early years provision, the budget, recruitment of staff and governor training. The local authority has planned its future involvement carefully, ensuring a gradual reduction in the level of support over the next school year.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Following an external review in June 2014, the governing body exerted its strategic role in shaping the school's future as a good and viable provider. It has wisely considered all options to find a secure and long-lasting leadership solution. Governors have stood firm, through several rounds of recruitment, to employ a new headteacher and other staff with the right skills to sustain the school's good capacity to bring about further improvement.
- Governors have followed a structured training programme to strengthen their role. The governing body holds the school to account. It monitors the school's work effectively by examining data, checking that policies are implemented consistently, and through governors' frequent visits to see teaching, learning and assessment in action. Self-evaluation is accurate, based on the headteacher's findings and endorsed through governors' independent view.
- The annual budget has been managed responsibly, with tough decisions made to achieve one of its core functions - value for money.
- Good achievement for pupils of all abilities, including the most and least able, has been central to the governing body's work. Underperformance in teaching has been tackled determinedly and pay awards for staff are dependent on good teaching.
- The governing body has made marketing and engagement with the community priorities in order to boost the number of pupils on roll.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The atmosphere in school is orderly, calm and purposeful. Pupils of all ages mix well, enjoy each other's company and appreciate diversity. Older pupils look after the younger ones sensitively.
- The older pupils recognise how behaviour in school has improved 'by children knowing the consequences'. They say that bullying has 'stopped completely' and that they would not hesitate to report anyone who was troubling them or anyone else.
- In all classrooms, pupils are enthusiastic about their learning. They have significantly improved their understanding of what is and what is not a good piece of work, and what it means to work hard. Written work in their books and on display shows remarkable improvement in the care and pride pupils are taking over neat presentation and clear and fluent handwriting.
- All pupils respond quickly and positively to instructions from adults. They take responsibility for retrieving resources and putting them away tidily, including in the early years class. They are responsible and look after toys, tools, books and play equipment carefully.
- Pupils enjoy celebrating each other's achievements such as 'writer of the week'. This reward is shared widely with parents. It has proved a positive incentive for pupils to try hard to improve their writing and has boosted their confidence.
- Pupils are beginning to rely less on adults to guide them every step of the way while they are learning. This has been a sea change in what pupils were used to previously and has made a significant difference in developing their good attitudes to learning.
- There have been no racist incidents reported this school year and the exclusion rate is nil.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils are specifically taught how to stay safe. For example, they are carefully briefed before taking part in visits and residential trips, and are expected to take appropriate responsibility for their own and others' well-being and safety.
- At break times, pupils play safely and use equipment sensibly. The playground is zoned with active sports and games separate from sedate activities to ensure pupils' safety and well-being. The 'golden garden', for example, is well used by pupils who prefer to meet up and chat quietly with friends.
- Pupils understand what bullying is and how to deal with it. Incidents involving bullying or racist name-calling are extremely rare, and this contributes to pupils' strong sense of well-being and safety as well as their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils know how to report anything that makes them feel personally unsafe or unhappy. They also share responsibility for not knowingly allowing others to experience any form of discrimination.
- Pupils know to 'think before you click' when using computers and tablets. They have a good understanding of e-safety because it is reinforced on a daily basis, as well as in more depth in computer studies and personal, social and health education sessions.
- Pupils feel safe and happy at school and their parents agree. Attendance has improved steadily and is currently average. This is a significant improvement from the previous inspection, when it was well below the national average. The school is working closely with a very few families whose children are absent more frequently than is usual, and has involved external agencies.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Across the school, teaching is consistently good and occasionally outstanding. Staff are working as an effective team, sharing good practice, welcoming advice from professionals who observe their teaching and, importantly, acting upon it. Their determination to develop and improve their practice has increased term-on-term through the journey out of special measures.
- Relationships between adults and pupils are trusting and strong. This lends confidence to pupils in their learning, as seen in their confidence to ask questions and contribute to discussions. Teachers implement the behaviour policy consistently. Pupils rise to teachers' high expectations for the quality of their work and productivity.
- Curriculum planning for the different abilities of individual pupils in literacy and mathematics is good because teachers are taking full account of what pupils already know and can do. This is particularly evident in the teaching of phonics, for example, where careful assessment ensures that pupils who are at the same level in reading are taught together so that teaching can focus closely on their particular learning needs.
- Staff are proficient in their use of technology to enhance and support pupils' learning and encourage pupils' appropriate use of it. They create inspiring spaces for learning in their classrooms with eye-catching displays of good quality work, interesting resources and artefacts for pupils to explore and appreciate. The well-stocked library is used widely to develop pupils' enjoyment of reading, as seen in digital images of 'extreme reading' at home, where parents caught their children reading up trees, in cellars and upside down on the sofa.
- The teaching of writing has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Pupils are making good, and in some cases outstanding, progress as a consequence. Teachers are using a wide range of approaches to inspire pupils as writers, including discussing and sharing thoughts and ideas as a prerequisite to writing them down. Pupils are thriving on the novel formats they are encouraged to use to present their written work.

- Pupils' work is marked regularly, to a high standard, and pupils are responding to the advice given. Pupils commented that marking 'tells you what you need to do better' and that: 'It helps me improve by knowing what I did wrong and when I do a new piece of writing I know what to change.' The whole-school marking policy is implemented consistently in all subjects.
- Teachers keep careful track of pupils' progress through regular assessments and analysis of data. They have responded positively to the headteacher's high expectations for pupils' performance and their increased accountability for pupils' achievement. Staff give pupils work that stretches them in literacy and numeracy, but they are only just beginning to develop their skills to achieve the same good quality provision in other subjects.
- Teachers' assessments of learning for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs against the early years and national curriculum statutory requirements are not sufficiently reflecting the good progress that pupils are making. This is because the requirements have not been broken down in smaller steps so that teachers are able to evaluate these pupils' progress with more precision.
- Teaching assistants generally provide expert support for the pupils they work with, particularly disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Over time, this group have been protected too much from making mistakes, reducing opportunities for them to develop resilience and make decisions for themselves. However, this is improving and these pupils are making markedly better progress as a consequence.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Individual starting points for children in the early years vary widely from year to year. On starting school, individual children have skills that are below, similar to or above those typical for their age. Importantly, whatever their starting points, they make good progress, with most reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year.
- With very small numbers of pupils in each year group, comparing pupils' attainment with national data is unreliable. Nonetheless, written work in pupils' exercise books shows that, over time, attainment is rising rapidly. Standards in Key Stage 1 are above average. In Key Stage 2, good teaching on a daily basis has enabled pupils to stride ahead, making up for previous lost ground, to reach at least national expectations by the end of Year 4.
- Pupils of all abilities, including the most able, make good progress in reading and mathematics. In writing, as seen in case studies of individual pupils and written work in their books, many have made outstanding progress during this school year. The level of challenge for the most-able pupils is rising rapidly as teachers become bolder in aiming high, and this is deepening these pupils' understanding and level of thinking.
- From an early age, children develop pleasure in reading and benefit from the systematic teaching of phonics, which enables them to progress quickly and confidently. This year, more pupils than ever before reached the national standard expected for phonics in Years 1 and 2. Pupils use their phonic knowledge proficiently to break down the sounds of words they have not come across before so that they can read them. They also understand how to interpret and use punctuation in texts to create mood and expression when they read aloud.
- The quality of pupils' handwriting has improved impressively in all classes. In the early years, children are forming their letters correctly and carefully, while in Years 3 and 4 they are using pens confidently and joining their letters accurately to develop fluent, well-formed script.
- There are too few pupils supported through the pupil premium or who speak English as an additional language to report on their attainment separately without risk of identifying them. However, the progress

these pupils make is good.

- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are making similar progress to their peers.

The early years provision

is good

- In the early years, every child makes good progress and none gets left behind. They achieve well, especially in the prime areas of learning (communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development) as well as in literacy and numeracy. The number of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year is rising year on year.
- The most-able children exceed expectations for the age range. They are developing as confident readers and writers, having benefited from consistently good and systematic teaching of phonics during the year. All of the children love the classic stories they are introduced to, such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, which they acted out confidently using props. They made caterpillar models and drawings, practised their counting, and learnt about the life-cycle of a butterfly.
- Relationships are strong and ensure that all children are well cared for. Effective adult support for the very few children with complex learning or other needs ensures that they too make rapid progress in their learning and personal development, albeit in smaller steps than the rest. Every child is included and supported expertly.
- Adult-led activities are particularly well planned, guiding the children through warm, positive interaction. For example, the teaching of phonics is made fun for all and holds the children's attention with a wide range of activities involving singing, chanting, moving, looking and listening. Children practise what they know already and learn new skills.
- The gradual shift towards more activities led by adults helps children to prepare for more formal learning in Year 1. However, at this point of the year, there is, by comparison, a more limited number of activities for the younger, Nursery-aged children to learn through exploration, experimentation and discovery as they play.
- All of the statutory health, safety and welfare requirements for the early years are met. Children behave considerately towards each other. They listen to the adults and respond to instructions.
- Children's achievements are suitably recorded and illustrated by digital images and examples of work in their learning journey books. Evidence of what they have already achieved is used to determine what children will learn next. This continuous assessment and evaluation of learning contributes to children's good achievement across the year.
- Good use is made of the school's extensive outdoor spaces for learning. For example, children collected natural materials in the school grounds to practise counting reliably and to work out 'one more' or 'one less'. When asked 'Why do we need to count?', one child quickly responded, 'So that we know how many we have got!'
- The good provision in the early years enables children to develop as happy, confident learners who form positive relationships with adults and each other. The school works in partnership with parents, who confirm that their children enjoy coming to school and make good progress.

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	117439
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	462735

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jackie King
Headteacher	Joanna Di-Bella
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2014
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Email address	admin@hormead.herts.sch.uk

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