

Sutton Valence Primary School

Sutton Valence, Maidstone, Kent ME17 3HT

Inspection dates	11–12 November 2015
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' progress is uneven between different subjects and classes. Pupils make slower progress in writing than in other subjects.
- While most pupils now make expected progress, too few make good gains in their learning, particularly in writing.
- Some pupils have gaps in their basic mathematics and English knowledge and understanding because of underachievement in the past.
- It is too early for the very recent, rapid improvements in the quality of teaching to have secured pupils' good and achievement. Teaching is not always effective and varies in quality.
- Teachers do not always have sufficiently high expectations of all pupils, particularly the most able.
- Teachers do not always set work at a suitable level for pupils' differing needs. Activities do not always extend or deepen pupils' understanding well enough.
- There are variations in the way teachers mark pupils' work. Some do not pick up and address spelling and punctuation errors in pupils' writing regularly enough.
- Teachers sometimes have lower expectations of the writing pupils complete in subjects other than English.
- Too few children in early years make good progress, particularly in writing.
- Activities in the early years outdoor area are not always as stimulating or engaging as those in the classroom.
- There are too few interesting opportunities for children to develop writing skills, particularly in the outdoor area.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and governors have secured much needed stability in the school. Their actions have accelerated the pace of development, securing important improvements in teaching and lifting achievement.
- Pupils' progress is accelerating in all years as better teaching takes effect.
- Teaching is improving and starting to address gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They feel safe and contribute well to school life.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' achievement, particularly in writing, by making sure that all teachers:
 - set tasks that match pupils' differing abilities and needs
 - have high expectations of all pupils, and especially the most able
 - plan work to close any gaps in pupils' basic mathematics and English knowledge and skills
 - have the highest expectations of pupils' written work in all subjects
 - identify and address basic punctuation and spelling mistakes in pupils' writing consistently and in line with the school's marking policy.
- Accelerate children's progress in early years, particularly in writing, by making sure that:
 - activities in the outdoor area are as stimulating and engaging as those in the classroom
 - children have plenty of opportunities to develop their writing skills, including in the outdoor area.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher has successfully led the school through a turbulent period, with many changes in staff, including at senior leadership level. The school is now benefiting from her perseverance and determination and changes are in place to secure stability and move the school forward.
- The school has a full complement of teachers, leaders and governors who understand and share the headteacher's vision for the school's future. Everyone is pulling together, with a renewed urgency about developments. The quality of teaching has improved rapidly and pupils' progress has accelerated in all year groups, lifting achievement in 2015. Parents say the school is moving in the right direction.
- Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching, combined with good quality training, are improving teachers' practice. Effective monitoring and support is addressing the few aspects remaining that need to be resolved.
- Leaders have improved the fabric and ethos of the school environment, so that it is tidy, attractive and welcoming. As a result, pupils enjoy coming to school and work hard. Relationships are positive and pupils behave well. Attendance has improved and pupils are keen to do their best.
- Leaders have eradicated an element of weak teaching and secured a new, enthusiastic and committed team of teachers. They have established effective procedures for managing teachers' performance, setting more challenging targets that are linked to pupils' achievement. This has raised expectations of teachers' performance.
- The deputy headteachers contribute very well to the school's leadership and to its development, working positively with staff, pupils and parents. One of the deputy headteachers has been central to establishing a robust and reliable system for checking pupils' progress. As a result, teachers are more accountable for pupils' progress.
- Teachers feel well supported and staff morale is good. One member of staff commented, 'This school has been on a massive journey in the short time I have been here', while another said, 'I absolutely love working at this school and am proud to be part of it'.
- The local authority improved support for the school following the most recent visit by Her Majesty's Inspector. As a result, their input has been tailored much more carefully to the school's development priorities over the past term and a half and has made a stronger contribution to improvements. For example, a local authority adviser has worked alongside senior leaders to strengthen the school's plans for development, so that individual staff are clearer about their roles and accountabilities.
- Pupil premium funding is used appropriately and with increasing effectiveness to help eligible pupils to learn successfully. For example, teaching assistants give pupils extra help to acquire phonics (letters and their sounds) skills, while social skills groups and specialist counselling effectively support pupils' emotional and behavioural development.
- Leaders check disadvantaged pupils' progress more frequently and rigorously than before to make sure that the extra help provided is working. One of the deputy headteachers has provided training for staff so that they are more aware of eligible pupils' needs and know how to support them in the classroom. This is making a difference to pupils' learning. Information about pupils' progress indicates that, while most make expected progress, their learning is improving, so that they have a much more secure grasp of the basic English and mathematics skills they need to be successful in their learning.
- Primary sports funding is used effectively. Leaders ensure that the school is resourced well, with good quality equipment, to support pupils' physical education. The range of sports clubs offered has increased and these are well attended. Specialist sports coaches have worked alongside teachers to improve the way physical education is taught. Teachers' planning builds more successfully on pupils' sports skills as they progress through the sequence of learning.
- British values are widely celebrated throughout the school on an everyday basis, as well as through special events. For example, during the inspection, pupils completed some thoughtful work about Remembrance Day and respectfully observed a two minute silence. One pupil commented that she felt British when she listened to Elgar's music during assembly. Pupils learn about democracy when they vote for representatives on the school council.
- Leaders have reviewed and updated the curriculum to ensure that pupils experience a broad and balanced diet of topics. Subjects are taught through a variety of interesting themes. Clubs make a valuable addition to pupils' experience of school. For example, during the inspection, pupils in the cake

decorating club thoroughly enjoyed making clown cakes, working carefully and using equipment safely.

- Teaching contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils learn about a range of cultures and beliefs. They appreciate and respect differences between people. Pupils listen with respect when their classmates speak in lessons. One pupil commented, 'If we were all the same it would be boring'. Positive attitudes such as these ensure that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are committed to ensuring all pupils achieve their best. Their roles have improved dramatically since the previous inspection. A national leader of governance has provided highly effective guidance for the governing body, bringing increased rigour and confidence to governors' work with senior leaders. New governors have been appointed with considerable experience in governance, and teamwork has improved. This has strengthened the work of the governing body substantially. Governors' roles and responsibilities are clearly identified in the school's plan for development. Governors are better informed about the school's work than at the time of the previous inspection and know how achievement compares with other schools nationally. They attend meetings with teachers and senior leaders about pupils' progress and know how well funds and extra help supports pupils' learning. Governors confidently question leaders about pupils' achievement, and regularly visit the school to meet teachers and to see the school in action. They speak with pupils about the work in their books. As a result, they know about improvements in the quality of pupils' work. Governors recognise the substantial improvement made by the headteacher in improving the school's ethos. They understand the journey the school is on to become a good school. They are aware of the next steps they need to take to iron out the remaining inconsistencies in teaching.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school site is secure and maintained efficiently. Staff are knowledgeable and well qualified. Governors regularly review safeguarding arrangements to ensure that they are complete and meet statutory requirements. Procedures to check staff suitability are systematic and robust.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- There are too many variations in the quality of teaching between different classes and subjects to secure pupils' good achievement. Although teaching is improving, with more stability in staffing and stronger leadership, not all teachers have consistently high expectations of all pupils, particularly the most able.
- The work teachers set is not always suitable for pupils' different needs, particularly in writing. This means that, at times, the work is too difficult for some pupils, while not stretching the most-able sufficiently. During the inspection, some pupils commented to inspectors that sometimes the work set in English is too easy.
- While there have been considerable improvements in the way teachers mark pupils' work and give them feedback, there are still some differences. Sometimes teachers do not address basic spelling and punctuation errors in pupils' writing. Teachers' expectations of pupils' written work in subjects other than English are not always high enough, so that the quality of pupils' work is not always the best they can produce.
- Almost all the teachers have joined the school very recently, and the quality of teaching has improved rapidly in a very short time. Pupils say they are much happier about their learning because they learn new things in lessons, rather than repeating work unnecessarily. One comment included, 'There are a lot of new teachers but they're all lovely'.
- All the teachers in the school are enthusiastic, committed and keen to take on advice from leaders about improving the quality of their teaching. Confident teaching is making up for lost time and there is an increasing buzz about learning. Teachers are successfully plugging gaps in pupils' learning caused by weak teaching in the past. As a result, pupils are completing work more confidently and successfully. Teaching now ensures that pupils make at least the progress expected of them, and sometimes better.
- Teaching assistants provide quiet, unobtrusive support for pupils who find learning more difficult. As a result, all pupils are fully involved in lessons.
- The teaching of reading has improved substantially. Consistent, regular teaching of phonics gives pupils the secure foundation they need to read and write successfully. Teachers provide interesting written tasks for pupils to complete which build well on previous learning. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Year 6 talked together enthusiastically about what to include in a newspaper report, confidently referring to the key features and purposes of report writing.

- Teachers give pupils frequent opportunities to use their mathematical knowledge to solve number problems, thus strengthening pupils' understanding. For example, pupils in Year 5 use information about measurement and length to successfully solve questions about the area and perimeter of shapes.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupil's personal development and welfare is good. Pupils are respectful and courteous. Pupils like school and are pleased with the improvements the headteacher has introduced. For example, they like the newly painted walls in the classrooms and corridors, and say the new sofas are welcoming and comfortable.
- Pupils say that bullying is not a problem because the headteacher would not allow it to happen. They say that events such as 'anti-bullying week' helpfully remind them about the harm bullying causes and about what they can do if they are worried.
- Pupils feel safe and secure in school. They say the headteacher has improved the playgrounds and outside areas so that they feel much safer. Almost all parents who completed the online questionnaire feel that pupils are safe in school.
- Pupils know how they can contribute to their own safety and well-being. For example, they are well informed about internet safety. They appreciate the 'worry boxes' in the classrooms and say their teachers sort out any concerns posted. One pupil commented, 'Teachers care of you in this school'.
- Leaders and teachers listen carefully to what pupils have to say about their experiences of school life and do what they can to respond to their requests and suggestions. For example, golf and basketball clubs have been introduced following pupils' recommendations.
- Pupils' good attitudes to learning help them to be successful learners. They take more care over the quality of their work than before, although a few could do even better.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They behave very well during breaktimes and when moving around school. They listen carefully during assemblies.
- Pupils say the headteacher has changed behaviour during lunchtimes for the better, so that the lunch break is a pleasant and positive occasion.
- Pupils welcome higher expectations of their work and respond enthusiastically. Most behave well during lessons, although occasionally a few get a bit carried away, becoming chatty and losing focus.
- Attendance has improved. Attendance was in line with the national average in 2014, rising to above average in 2015. The proportions of pupils persistently absent from school are much lower than the national average. Pupils arrive punctually and know why this is important in their learning.
- Most parents who completed the online questionnaire feel that pupils are well behaved, happy and well cared for in school.
- Breakfast club provides those pupils who attend with a healthy, enjoyable breakfast and a safe, relaxed start to the school day.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- There are too many variations in the progress pupils make in different subjects. Pupils make slower progress in writing than in reading and mathematics.
- The most able do not achieve as well as they should. While they make expected progress overall, lack of sufficient challenge in the work set for these pupils means they do not always make the best progress possible. The proportion of pupils attaining Level 3 (the highest level at the end of Key Stage 1) has been below average for the past two years, with a further decline in 2015. At Key Stage 2, the proportion attaining the higher levels (Level 5) in 2015 were average in reading but below average in mathematics. In writing, the proportion was well below the national average in writing and lower than the previous year.
- Until recently, pupils' written work was often poor quality, messy or unfinished. This was particularly the

case when pupils completed work in subjects other than English, such as topic books and religious education books.

- Pupils' written work is much improved this term. Handwriting has improved dramatically since the start of term because leaders have made it clear to teachers that pupils need to achieve more. Pupils are quickly developing consistent, joined handwriting styles. They take more care with their work, which is now tidy and well presented, because they know their teachers will recognise their efforts.
- Pupils are learning some of the basic technical knowledge needed to write successfully, such as how to use capital letters and speech marks to organise their writing. They are developing secure learning skills, including how to read, check and improve their written work. However, the quality of writing in lessons other than English is not always of the same standard.
- The school's information about pupils' progress and the work in pupils' books indicates pupils' progress is accelerating in reading, writing and mathematics. However, while this means that most pupils make the progress expected of them, too few make good progress from their starting points, particularly in writing.
- Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 has been consistently average in reading, writing and mathematics since the previous inspection, representing steady progress from pupils' starting points.
- Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 improved significantly in 2015. Attainment in mathematics improved substantially in 2015 to average levels, while in reading, attainment increased and was above the national average. However, attainment in writing has been below average for the past two years, with a further decline in 2015.
- Pupils' make better progress in reading than in writing and mathematics. However, as with other subjects, too few pupils make good progress. Pupils like reading and say that they can choose from a wide range of books and authors in school. Older pupils read confidently and with great expression. They enjoy discussing their reading and do so maturely. Younger readers use phonics knowledge well to read successfully. In mathematics, pupils are developing the confidence and skills to tackle number problems successfully. They use mathematical vocabulary accurately to discuss how they will complete tasks. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Year 3 learnt about the properties of shapes while discussing how to make three dimensional models.
- The results of the Year 1 phonics check improved substantially in 2015 to above average levels. Disadvantaged pupils did much better than the previous year, with results for this group also above the national average.
- There are very few disadvantaged pupils in each year group, so their achievement is not reported in detail. The work in their books indicates that these pupils are making similar progress to their classmates. Teaching is successfully addressing the gaps in their learning caused by historic weaknesses in teaching so that they are better placed to achieve well.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make steady progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Improved teaching means that this group's progress is accelerating, in line with their classmates.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- Children make the progress expected of them from their starting points during early years. However, teaching is not yet consistently good enough. As a result, too few make the rapid progress of which they are capable, particularly in writing.
- There are too few opportunities for children to practise writing skills, despite recent improvements in the range of activities provided.
- Children's knowledge and skills when they join Reception are usually in line with those typical for their age and sometimes higher. In 2014, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception was average, so that children are suitably prepared for learning in Year 1. The proportion increased in 2015, reflecting improvements in provision.
- Most children have well-developed language skills, communicating clearly with their friends and teachers. For example, during the inspection children talked about what size of wiggly eyes they use to make dragon faces – the 'larger', the 'smaller' or the 'smallest'. However, activities and teaching are not always sufficiently demanding to extend children's language skills, particularly in the outdoor area.
- Children are happy, polite and well behaved. They listen carefully when adults are talking and enthusiastically contribute their ideas.

- Relationships are good. Children are keen to get on with the activities provided and cooperate well with each other. They share equipment nicely and are sensitive to their classmates' needs. Parents say that their children have settled into school well and feel safe.
- Interesting, lively teaching captures children's attention well. Adults have improved the quality of activities in the classroom, so that they are interesting and engaging. However, activities in the outdoor area are more limited.
- Teachers display children's work, such as their colourful firework pictures, with care. This contributes well to children's growing self esteem.
- The recently appointed early years leader has made a good start and is clear about the improvements needed in early years provision. For example, she has improved the environment, making sure that children can readily access resources and so become more independent and confident. She has improved links with parents, with workshops and events to support them in helping their children's learning at home. However, it is too soon for the impact of improvements to be fully evident in children's achievement.

School details

Unique reference number	118314
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection Number	10002348

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	186
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Patricia Mason
Headteacher	Marianne Terry
Telephone number	01622 842188
Website	www.sutton-valence.kent.sch.uk
Email address	office@sutton-valene.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–20 September 2013

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is below that found in most schools. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, and looked after children.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- The school did not meet the government’s current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils’ attainment and progress, in 2014. However, recently published achievement information suggests the school is likely to meet floor standards in 2015.
- The school provides full-time early years provision in a Reception class.
- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and early years leader have all been appointed since the previous inspection. Five of the seven class teachers currently in the school were appointed in September 2015. The inclusion leader also joined the school in September 2015, as well as an additional deputy headteacher, seconded from another school for the autumn term. The Chair of Governors was appointed in January 2015.
- There is a breakfast club and an after school club on the school site, both of which are managed by the school and were included in this inspection.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed learning in 14 lessons or part lessons, including six observed with the headteacher or deputy headteachers.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, teachers, members of staff, parents and pupils. They also held a meeting with the Chair of Governors and two other governors.
- The inspection team took account of 37 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 17 staff questionnaires. In addition, they considered the views expressed by parents who spoke with them informally at the start of the school day, as well as written comments received during the inspection.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and considered a range of documents, including the school's improvement plan, information about pupils' progress, attendance records and safeguarding policies.
- The inspection team looked at a sample of pupils' work provided by the school, as well as looking at pupils' work in lessons. Inspectors listened to pupils in Year 2 and 6 reading.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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