

# Hilltop Primary School

Hilltop Road, Frindsbury, Rochester, Kent ME2 4QN

## Inspection dates

24–25 February 2016

## Overall effectiveness

**Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide determined and very effective leadership for the school.
- As a result of their relentless and successful drive and ambition, which is shared by all leaders, staff and governors, the school has improved since the previous inspection.
- Pupils are a credit to the school. They develop as exceptionally well-rounded, confident individuals who enjoy their time in school and have excellent attitudes to learning. They are respectful, friendly and well mannered.
- Pupils are looked after extremely well by staff. There are very positive and trusting relationships between staff and pupils.
- Pupils behave well in lessons, around the school and in the playground. They feel safe and happy at school.
- Children get an outstanding start to school in the early years. They make excellent progress and rapidly develop their confidence and independence and a love of learning.
- Teaching is now good. Teachers plan activities that interest and engage pupils. All groups of pupils learn well and make good progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. By the end of Year 6, standards of attainment are above average.
- Parents are very positive about all aspects of the school's work and very supportive of the headteacher and deputy headteacher. One parent echoed the views of many with the comment, 'All the staff are enthusiastic and caring and always try to make sure the children get the most out of their time at Hilltop. I am proud that my children and I are part of such a lovely school.'

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The impact of the work of subject and middle leaders on raising achievement and the quality of teaching is not yet consistently strong in all areas.
- A few inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment mean that sometimes pupils do not make the rapid progress of which they are capable.

## **Full report**

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Build on the improvements already made to the work of subject and middle leaders to ensure that the impact of their work has an even greater focus on raising achievement and the quality of teaching and learning so there is consistency with the high quality evident in some areas.
- Ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently high to enable all pupils to make the rapid progress of which they are capable by providing more opportunities to share the best practice.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher provides very effective leadership for the school. One parent echoed the views of many with the comment, 'The headteacher leads the school very well indeed and has made some fantastic changes to Hilltop. He is highly visible around the school, making himself accessible for parents to approach him. He is genuine, sincere and acts with integrity which is echoed throughout the school.' The inspection findings fully support this view.
- The headteacher is very well supported by the deputy headteacher. Together with the governing body, they have worked successfully to improve the school since the previous inspection. They have high expectations for staff and pupils and share the ambition and determination to improve the school further. They have created a strong team of staff who support each other and are working towards the same aims.
- Senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and key areas for development from their rigorous monitoring of the school's work. This work informs a detailed plan to drive further improvement.
- The role of middle and subject leaders has been developed since the previous inspection. Some leaders are relatively new to their role. Expectations are clear and they are held to account for their subjects and areas of responsibility. They provide helpful guidance and support to colleagues. Some subject and middle leadership is very effective, for example in mathematics. There remains, however, some variability in the quality of the impact of leaders' work in raising achievement and influencing the quality of teaching, as well as in the effectiveness of their action plans.
- Regular checks are made on the quality of teaching by senior leaders. If any weaknesses are identified, senior leaders take rapid and decisive action to support and provide additional training. Teachers are keen to develop their skills and provide the very best learning experiences for pupils, so they welcome the support and guidance. Improvement is expected and any teaching that remains below the standard expected is unacceptable.
- Pupils' progress is tracked regularly to check that pupils are on track to meet their targets. If any pupils are falling behind, appropriate support is provided to help them catch up. Senior leaders check this information to ensure that individuals and groups of pupils, including pupils who have special educational needs or disability and disadvantaged pupils, are doing as well as they should. This reflects the school's promotion of equal opportunities.
- The additional funding of the pupil premium is carefully considered to ensure that it is providing effective support for eligible pupils. Appropriate interventions help to close gaps in pupils' academic outcomes as well as developing personal and social skills. As a result, disadvantaged pupils play a full part in the life of the school and make similar progress to others.
- Leaders have designed a curriculum that is broad and balanced. The topic themes engage, motivate and inspire pupils to be aspirational as well as linking learning across a range of subjects. This is a key factor in pupils' improved outcomes and their outstanding personal development. A parent commented, 'The lessons are far more interesting and my child loves to learn about new topics on a regular basis.' Pupils have many opportunities to use their writing skills in a range of subjects, as seen in their 'Write Way' books.
- The curriculum is enriched with trips that link to topics which pupils say they really enjoy as 'it makes things real'. The school provides a wide range of extra activities and clubs that take place before school, during lunchtimes or after school. Holiday clubs are also provided. Clubs are well attended and enrich pupils' learning experiences and contribute to developing personal skills. One parent wrote, 'the after school provision at this school is fantastic and my child loves attending after school and holiday clubs here.'
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through the curriculum, the school's values and assemblies. Leaders and staff ensure that pupils are effectively prepared for life in modern Britain as they promote fundamental British values in all areas of the school and foster a culture of tolerance and respect.
- In their questionnaire responses and in discussions, pupils agree that the school encourages them to respect people from other backgrounds and to treat everyone equally. Pupils understand the need for rules in the school community and beyond in the wider society. They learn about and celebrate different religions and cultures.

- The school makes effective use of the primary physical education and sport funding, including working in partnership with a secondary school, to enhance pupils' and teachers' skills and therefore improve outcomes for pupils.
- Parents are exceptionally supportive of the school and express every confidence in the leadership and the staff. They especially appreciate the opportunity to attend assemblies when pupils' achievements, both academic and personal, are celebrated and rewarded with merit certificates. They also appreciate the fact that staff, including the headteacher and deputy headteacher, are at the gate in the morning to welcome them and their children. Several parents commented on how impressed they were that the deputy headteacher knew the names of all the children during her first week in the school. One parent summed up parents' positive views with the comment, 'Hilltop has been a fantastic force for good for my children.'
- **The governance of the school**
  - The governing body has taken clear action since the previous inspection to improve the way in which it works. Governors have reorganised the committee structure, leading to more effective and efficient ways of working.
  - They are now well informed by senior leaders and, combined with their own regular monitoring programme, have a clear awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the school's performance, which enables them to challenge as well as support the school.
  - They check that all arrangements to manage teachers' performance are in place and ensure that only the best teaching is rewarded. They support the headteacher in tackling any weaknesses in teaching and securing new appointments to increase leadership capacity.
  - Governors' strategic decisions have a positive impact on improving outcomes for pupils, for example, appointing an additional teacher to work in Year 6.
  - Governors ensure that additional funding is managed well and that the impact of the funding is making a difference for pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged.
  - The governing body, under the leadership of the new Chair of the Governing Body, is determined to review how it can further increase its effectiveness in holding the school to account for its performance.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Arrangements to keep pupils safe are robust. Systems and procedures are well established and implemented by all staff, who have up-to-date training.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. As a result, pupils make good progress and achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teachers know their pupils well. One parent wrote of the 'Very hard working staff who take the time to really get to know the children and go the extra mile for them.'
- The trusting and positive relationships between pupils and staff mean that pupils are not afraid to ask if they do not understand something. They know that their opinions and efforts are valued and so are prepared to try things out for themselves and 'have a go'.
- Pupils learn in a calm, orderly environment. They have excellent, positive attitudes to learning, work hard and are keen to do their best. Pupils' good behaviour and excellent personal skills help them work together well, share their ideas and opinions and make good progress. Pupils in Year 6, for example, worked together well to discuss ideas for character descriptions based on the book *Street Child*. They went on to write good quality paragraphs and made good progress in meeting their learning objectives.
- The school's policy for marking and feedback is used consistently across the school. Pupils say that teachers' comments help them know how to improve their work. Pupils know what they need to do to succeed in lessons. They have opportunities to reflect on their learning and assess for themselves how well they think they have done and if they are meeting their targets.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are skilled in questioning pupils to extend pupils' thinking and learning. This also gives teachers the opportunity to pick up any misunderstandings or provide further challenges where appropriate to help pupils make good progress.
- There is an appropriate emphasis on teaching reading, writing and mathematics and good opportunities to develop these skills in other subjects.
- Pupils present their work neatly and clearly and with a clear sense of pride in what they achieve. Classroom displays and the use of technology support teaching and learning well.

- Most teachers have high expectations for standards of work and behaviour in lessons and provide appropriate challenges for the most able and support for those who find learning more difficult.
- Teachers generally plan and organise lessons well so that pupils enjoy them and find them interesting and challenging. Leaders are correctly aware, however, that within the overall picture of good teaching there is some inconsistency across the school and, as a result, some pupils of all abilities do not always make the rapid progress of which they are capable.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good**

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The school's values are encapsulated in the word PRIDE – positive, respectful, interactive, dedicated and eco-friendly – and the motto, 'Be the best you can be'. Pupils promote these values exceptionally well in all that they do and have excellent attitudes to learning. They are especially proud to receive PRIDE badges which celebrate their achievements.
- Pupils enjoy their time in school and thrive in a happy, caring environment. They develop as extremely well-rounded individuals and confident, self-assured learners.
- A parent summed up the views of many with the comment, 'Hilltop has been a great place for my child to be educated. She not only has received an academic education but has gained some valuable life skills that she will use throughout the rest of her life. The school really does care about the whole child.'
- Attendance has been above the national average for the past three years and has improved. Leaders carefully track the attendance of different groups and individuals and work with pupils and parents to promote regular attendance. Before-school clubs and early-morning sessions have helped to improve attendance.
- The breakfast club provides a social, safe and healthy start to the day.
- Pupils are very polite, friendly, caring and respectful towards each other and adults and visitors to school.
- Pupils thoroughly enjoy taking responsibility such as members of the school council, play leaders and running the tuck shop. They take their responsibilities seriously and older pupils are very good role models for younger pupils.
- Pupils say they feel very safe in school and know how to stay safe when using the internet and social media. They say that any bullying is very rare and 'hardly ever happens because it's not allowed here'. Pupils are very confident that if any issues should arise, teachers would listen to them and deal with any problems quickly and fairly. They have a very good understanding that bullying can take different forms. They know that any language or actions that may cause offence would not be tolerated and that they are safe to learn without any type of discrimination.
- All staff know the pupils very well. As a consequence, individual welfare needs, including social, physical and emotional needs, are supported exceptionally well so that pupils are always included and make good progress.
- The home school inclusion officer makes a very positive contribution to supporting children and their families who may be vulnerable by working with them to reduce any barriers to learning.
- Parents strongly agree that their children are happy in school, feel safe and are well looked after. One parent wrote, 'This is a fantastic nurturing school. It encourages my children to work to the best of their abilities and supports them to achieve their full potential.' Another wrote, 'It is a happy environment at Hilltop where children are encouraged to thrive and achieve and good manners and positive attitudes are instilled in children from the outset.'

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. School records confirm that behaviour is good over time.
- Expectations for behaviour are made very clear to pupils, so they behave well in class and this helps them make good progress.
- Pupils generally show responsible attitudes and conduct themselves well in the playground, at lunchtimes and around the school. Pupils always respond well to teachers' and other adults' instructions because they know how they should behave. On occasion, however, some pupils need to be reminded too frequently by adults rather than managing their own behaviour.

- Occasionally when pupils' interest is not sustained in lessons, some can become distracted and lose their focus on learning. Pupils agree that pupils behave well most of the time in lessons and around the school.
- All parents who responded to the online questionnaire agree that the school ensures that pupils behave well.

## Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils' achievement has improved since the previous inspection. Most pupils are now making good and improving progress from their starting points and are on track to be well prepared for the next stage of their education by the end of Year 6. Standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils' work in their books and the school's information about progress show that pupils currently in the school make good progress overall in reading, writing and mathematics. Most of the current pupils are making at least the expected progress in all year groups. The proportion of pupils who are making more rapid progress is a little uneven across the year groups and, except in Year 2 and Year 6, it is less marked in writing than it is in reading and mathematics.
- Most pupils are achieving outcomes expected for their age across a range of subjects. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about their learning in other subjects such as history, geography, science, art, music and sport. The school benefits from having a large indoor heated swimming pool, which enables pupils to swim throughout the year and develop a good level of competence in swimming. There are some impressive displays of work in a range of subjects around the school.
- In 2015, the proportion of pupils making the expected progress by the end of Year 6 was above average in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion making progress that was better than expected was below average in reading, close to average in writing and above average in mathematics.
- Attainment by the end of Year 2 in 2015 was significantly above that found nationally and this has been the pattern for the past three years, with a rising trend.
- In 2015, progress and attainment was not as strong in reading as it was in writing and mathematics. Leaders quickly identified this and are taking effective action to raise achievement. There is a focus on promoting enjoyment of reading for all pupils, and particularly boys, and encouraging pupils to use their reading to influence their writing.
- In 2015, the proportion of pupils who reached the required level in the Year 1 phonics check (letters and the sounds that they make) was just above the national average. Pupils use phonic skills well to read unfamiliar words and to help with their writing.
- Mathematics has been a focus since the previous inspection and the impact of the school's work is evident in pupils' improved achievement in the subject. Higher expectations, a focus on mathematics activities that are relevant in other areas of the curriculum, effective additional support, a detailed action plan with measurable targets and good leadership have all made a contribution to the improvement in mathematics.
- Currently, the most-able pupils are generally challenged to achieve well and make good progress. This is particularly evident in mathematics.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs currently make similar progress to others. Their needs are identified at an early stage and appropriate, well-targeted help is provided. The provision for this group is managed effectively. Pupils benefit from good additional support in lessons and when working individually or in small groups outside of the classroom. As a result, their needs are met well.
- In 2015, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 was above that of other pupils nationally and others in the school in mathematics, but below other pupils nationally and others in the school in reading and writing. Leaders carefully monitor the impact of any additional support provided for disadvantaged pupils in all year groups. As a result, pupils make similar progress to other groups. Although some gaps in attainment remain, they are narrowing and in some classes they achieve better than others.

## Early years provision

is outstanding

- Children start in the early years with skills and knowledge that are overall slightly below those typical for their age, particularly in writing, with strengths in aspects of their personal, social and emotional development.

- From their starting points, children make outstanding progress and catch up quickly. By the end of the Reception year they are extremely well prepared to continue their learning in Year 1.
- In 2015, the proportion of children that reached a good level of development was considerably above that found nationally and this showed a marked improvement from 2014, even though that proportion too was above the national figure.
- All groups, including disadvantaged children and children who have special educational needs or disability, make similar rapid progress, as their needs are met well in the early years.
- Excellent leadership of the early years ensures that children learn very effectively in a stimulating, safe and secure environment. Staff know the children very well. All the welfare and safeguarding requirements are met, so that children learn and play safely and learn how to keep themselves safe.
- There is a very welcoming, friendly atmosphere and children are very happy and settle calmly into the routines of the day.
- There are very good procedures to get to know the children and their families before they start at school. Excellent relationships with parents continue throughout children's time in the Reception classes. Parents are very well informed about their children's progress and work with the school to support their children's learning.
- Children's independence and confidence is promoted extremely well. They share and co-operate very well with each other at work and play in the classroom and the outdoor area.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding. Children are very well behaved and eager to learn because they are motivated by interesting and exciting activities and want to explore and find things out for themselves. As a result, they develop creative and enquiring minds. Assessment is used extremely well to help plan the next steps in learning, which always take children's interests into account.
- Consistent and highly effective teaching of phonics ensures that children develop a very secure knowledge and use of early reading and writing skills. Children have many opportunities to write to communicate. For example, children were very excited to write letters to a dragon, which provided memorable learning as they were still talking about it all during playtime. All children were highly motivated and particularly boys, as teachers had correctly identified the need to promote their enjoyment and engagement in writing.
- Staff in the early years work very well as a team. They are very skilled in questioning children to extend their thinking, and vocabulary to promote children's language and communication skills.
- The outdoor area has been a focus for development and the leader has correctly identified further development to ensure that learning is supported at the same high level outside as it is in the classroom.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	118473
<b>Local authority</b>	Medway
<b>Inspection number</b>	10005737

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	423
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Sarah Weeden-Arter
<b>Headteacher</b>	Gavin Evans
<b>Telephone number</b>	01634 710312
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.hilltop.medway.sch.uk">www.hilltop.medway.sch.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:evang079@medwaymail.org">evang079@medwaymail.org</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	14–15 November 2013

## Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is below average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed learning in 23 lessons, some of which were joint observations with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. Inspectors talked to pupils about their work and looked at the work in pupils' books. They observed pupils at playtime and lunchtime and in assembly and asked them for their views on the school. Inspectors also talked to pupils about reading and listened to some pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other staff with key leadership responsibilities.
- Discussions were held with governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, including: the school's own check on its performance and the quality of teaching; the school improvement plan; information on pupils' progress and records relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.
- Inspectors looked at the 100 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, which included 51 written comments and one letter given to inspectors. They also spoke to some parents at the start of the school day. Inspectors also took account of 18 questionnaires returned by staff and 95 returned by pupils.

## Inspection team

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