

Somersham Primary School

Parkhall Road, Somersham, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE28 3EU

Inspection dates

2–3 March 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

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|----------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Requires improvement |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Requires improvement |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Requires improvement |
| 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

- The school has not improved enough since its last inspection to become good. This is because it has been without its senior leaders for a prolonged period of time.
- There is too much inconsistency in teaching for it to be good. While pupils make expected progress, too few make accelerated progress.
- The work is often too easy for the most-able pupils. Sometimes low expectations limit what they can achieve.
- The school has not spent the pupil premium effectively enough to ensure that gaps in attainment close rapidly between disadvantaged pupils and the others.
- The absence of the headteacher and deputy headteacher has unsettled some of the older pupils and this has meant that behaviour has not been as good as it was at the time of the last inspection.
- Phase and subject leaders have not had enough opportunity to influence achievement in their areas of responsibility markedly.
- Governors were too ready to accept the information they were being given in the past and did not challenge senior leaders enough about disappointing outcomes for pupils.
- The proportion of children reaching a good level of development in the early years has been below average. Only recently has the provision shown signs of concerted improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- The new interim headteachers have quickly begun to turn things around and are having a positive influence on all areas of the school.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability make good progress because they are well supported.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are good. Pupils support one another well and are kept safe in school.
- Aspects of pupils' social and moral development are good.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' achievement, so that:
 - pupils have more opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge across a range of subjects
 - pupils have the chance to deepen and broaden their learning, especially the most able
 - attainment gaps close between disadvantaged pupils and the others
 - teachers use assessment information to tailor provision to the needs of different groups of pupils
 - children in the early years engage in purposeful activity that especially promotes their early literacy skills.

- Strengthen the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - making well-informed decisions about the future leadership of the school
 - involving middle leaders in widening their roles to bring about school improvement
 - implementing the governors' action plan to improve the work of the governing body
 - deepening aspects of pupils' spiritual and cultural awareness.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- The interim headteachers have very quickly assessed the challenges facing the school. They have identified what it does well and the areas where things need to improve.
- Already, in a short space of time, the interim headteachers have made a positive difference to the drive for improvement and have energised and enthused staff.
- Inevitably, the extended absence of the headteacher, deputy headteacher and another senior leader has slowed down the rate of improvement. Staff have not benefited from the regular and robust monitoring of their work that would normally happen. The interim headteachers have taken this in hand and have reintroduced a system of checks and analysis that means that staff are once again aware of how they are doing and how they could improve further.
- Phase leaders run their teams well on a day-to-day basis, but have not had enough experience of the wider school context, or how their work contributes to school improvement as a whole. Subject leaders have not had much opportunity to check teaching across the school.
- While the school promotes social and moral aspects of pupils' development well, their spiritual and cultural awareness is not as strong as it could be. Pupils have some understanding of other faiths, but this is mainly superficial.
- Pupils show they have a good understanding of the British values of fair play and tolerance, and have some idea about democracy. In these respects, they are adequately prepared for life in modern Britain.
- As part of their work on food and farming, older pupils have been learning about food from different countries and fair trade. However, pupils do not know enough about the wide range of cultures that make up modern Britain.
- Teachers have worked hard to plan a curriculum that is broad and balanced and meets a range of needs. There are some good examples of careful and thoughtful work, such as about the Tudors in Years 3 and 4. However, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills across different subjects.
- There has not been enough evaluation of the effectiveness of the curriculum, which has meant that at times learning has not been adapted to enable pupils to make as much progress as they can. For example, in some subjects, the overuse of commercial worksheets sets limits on what pupils can achieve, and this holds back the most able in particular.
- Pupils benefit from a wide range of clubs and visits to places of interest. Many pupils learn musical instruments and are part of the school's thriving band or choir. The older pupils have the opportunity to develop their independence through going on a residential visit.
- The sports premium has been spent well on widening the range of sports on offer to pupils and has seen an increase in their participation. Teachers' skills have improved as a result of coaching by specialists.
- The spending of the pupil premium has not been as effective as it could have been. While this group of pupils has made expected progress, this has not been rapid enough to close gaps quickly. The interim headteachers have identified increasing the effectiveness of pupil premium spending as one of their key priorities.
- While there is clearly still much to be done, the interim headteachers have demonstrated that under their focused direction and guidance, the immediate future of the school is assured.
- The management of teachers' performance was reviewed before senior leaders took leave of absence, and so the interim headteachers have been able to hold staff to account against their targets for improvement. These are based on whole-school priorities and the progress of pupils and are appropriate for moving teaching forward.
- The local authority has been very supportive of the school and has been instrumental in securing the services of the two high-quality interim leaders. It has also been a great support to the governing body.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors accept that in the past they have not challenged disappointing outcomes for pupils robustly enough.
 - The effectiveness of governance has improved recently following a thorough external review. Governors responded positively to this, drew up a clear plan of action and have made changes to the way they work. As a result, they are in a stronger position to make the right strategic decisions for the school and to hold leaders more to account for the rate of school improvement.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff have been trained in keeping pupils safe and know what to do if they have any concerns. Parents expressed great confidence in the school's ability to keep their children safe. Leaders keep careful records of the actions they have taken to ensure pupils' safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- There is inconsistent teaching across year groups. The progress of pupils slows when limits are placed on what they can achieve because teachers use a limited range of approaches. For example, the most-able pupils are sometimes restricted in the amount of writing they can produce and in how they set out their work because they are asked to complete worksheets that constrain what they can achieve.
- In some classes, teachers' expectations of pupils are not high enough. They do not know the needs of pupils well enough to plan work that is sufficiently challenging for them. This results in pupils being given work to do that they find too easy and this means that they do not make the rapid progress they could.
- In other classes teachers know about pupils' levels of attainment and use these to plan work that suits them. For example, pupils in Years 1 and 2 were able to draw their own number lines to work out how to subtract two-digit numbers from three-digit numbers.
- Relationships are strong in classes across the school. Pupils say that they find teachers helpful and that they appreciate the support they receive.
- Teachers ensure that teaching assistants are briefed well and used where they can be most effective in providing assistance for groups and individuals. The good training that teaching assistants receive means that they have a positive impact on pupils' progress, especially when working with pupils who have special educational needs or disability.
- In some classes, teachers use questioning effectively to extend pupils' understanding. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 were encouraged to explain their reasoning when solving word problems involving fractions.
- Pupils are clear about what they are learning in most cases because teachers explain clearly the focus of the lesson. They use technology effectively to help pupils understand what is expected of them, for example by projecting images of the kind of work they want to see.
- Teachers apply the school's marking and feedback policy with reasonable consistency. They hold regular meetings with individuals to discuss their progress and to agree targets with them about how they can improve their work. This means that pupils are very clear about what they need to learn next.
- Attractive displays in classrooms give pupils useful and relevant prompts about their learning. They refer to these sometimes when they are not sure how to proceed with their work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are courteous and well-mannered and keen to help one another and staff.
- In class, pupils are eager to learn and respond particularly well to teaching that challenges and excites them.
- Pupils take a pride in belonging to the school and being part of one large community. They enjoyed coming into school dressed as their favourite book character for World Book Day, which took place during the inspection.
- Pupils are accepting of one another's differences. Inspectors observed pupils reassuring one another and comforting a younger child who was upset.
- Pupils like to support those who are less fortunate than themselves through fundraising activities such as cake sales.
- Pupils say they feel safe at school and bullying is not an issue. They understand different forms of bullying and know about e-safety. The Reception children fill in simple risk assessments for the outside area.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Behaviour standards are not as consistently good as they were found to be at the time of the last inspection.
- Some older pupils have been unsettled by the lack of leadership due to staff absence and this has made it difficult for staff to follow the behaviour policy elements that involve senior leaders. However, with the arrival of the interim headteachers, this is now being addressed and the school is more settled.
- Pupils like the new house system that has recently been introduced. They enjoy it when their achievements are recognised and like having something to work towards.
- Most pupils behave well in the corridors and dining hall. Older pupils help the younger ones as lunchtime buddies.
- The school environment is clean and attractive. Stimulating displays brighten up the public areas and celebrate pupils' work.
- Attendance is average. Pupils are punctual. Leaders work effectively with the few families who sometimes struggle to get their children to school regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- During a period of unsettled leadership pupils' progress was not as strong as it should have been, leading to some underachievement.
- Leaders who remained in the school had to leave their classes with temporary staff to take on the additional responsibilities left by absent senior colleagues, and this meant that pupils' learning experiences became more uneven.
- In Key Stage 2, standards were mixed by the end of Year 6. While they were average in reading and writing, they were below average in mathematics and spelling, punctuation and grammar. Pupils did not make the progress they should have done from their starting points, particularly in mathematics.
- Too few of the most-able pupils are making the accelerated progress that would help them to reach the higher levels of attainment. In 2015 the proportions of pupils reaching the higher Level 5 in reading, writing and mathematics were too low. This was because in some cases teaching did not give pupils sufficient scope to deepen and broaden their learning and understanding.
- Too often the most-able pupils are given work that does not fully extend them, or are expected to complete similar work to other pupils before moving onto something more challenging. This does not enable them to make the rapid progress of which they are capable.
- In 2015 gaps were wide between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in the school and others nationally. The impact of the pupil premium in closing gaps was not strong enough.
- Currently, across the school, a renewed focus on supporting disadvantaged pupils is ensuring that their needs are being met. It is too early to see the full impact of this work on closing gaps.
- There have been signs of improvement in the early years and in the Year 1 check on phonics (letters and the sounds that they represent). While still below average, the proportion of Reception children achieving a good level of development increased in 2015 and the gap with the national average narrowed.
- In 2015 the proportion of pupils reaching the required standard in the national phonics check increased and was broadly average.
- Pupils make expected progress across the early years and in Key Stage 1 from their different starting points. In 2015 standards by the end of Year 2 were average in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportions of pupils reaching the higher levels of attainment were also broadly average.
- This year leaders have worked hard to increase the rate of pupils' progress and raise standards. Attainment is generally broadly as expected for pupils' ages across the school and most pupils are making at least expected progress.
- Pupils enjoy reading and use a range of approaches to help them tackle new words. Older pupils can explain why they like certain authors and infer information from text.
- There is good support for pupils who have special educational needs or disability which is targeted well and individually. Effective systems have meant that these pupils' achievement has been carefully checked, enabling most of them to achieve well.
- Pupils are reasonably well equipped for secondary school. They have some good learning habits. However, standards are not yet as high as they could be.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- Too few children have made good progress from their starting points. In recent years the proportion of pupils attaining a good level of development, while improving, has been below average. In particular, pupils have not been given enough opportunities to develop their writing skills.
- Children tend to play individually and are not yet at the stage where they can cooperate in sustained activity. Some children are unfocused and tend to move between activities without settling. This is because some activities lack a clear purpose and do not engage the children sufficiently.
- The interim headteachers identified deficiencies in the classroom as a place where children could learn. They initiated a major renewal of the environment, drawing on expertise from their own schools. This was revealed to children and parents as a 'grand launch' during the inspection.
- The classroom is now, in its newly refurbished state, attractive and stimulating, giving children easy access to a wide range of resources.
- Staff are responding well to new approaches to teaching promoted by the interim headteachers and the staff from their schools. However, it is early days for the early years. It is too soon to see the impact of the changes.
- Parents welcome the fresh look to the early years classrooms and say their children settle quickly and are happy. Staff work well with parents to include them and to keep them informed about how their children are doing.
- Staff keep careful records of how children are doing and assemble examples of their work and observations of their achievements in 'learning journeys'. They could make more use of these to plan work that really challenges the most-able children and develops children's literacy skills.
- The strong leadership from the interim headteachers and their staff has given a renewed focus to the early years provision. Staff know what still needs to improve and are working hard to raise standards. As a result, children are better equipped for Year 1 now than they have been in previous years.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 110689 |
| Local authority | Cambridgeshire |
| Inspection number | 10009149 |

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

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|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 285 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Jon Carpenter |
| Headteacher | Paul Woodman Julie Branch (interim headteacher) Becky Ford (interim headteacher) |
| Telephone number | 01487 840412 |
| Website | www.somershamprimary.co.uk |
| Email address | office@somersham.cambs.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 4–5 March 2014 |

Information about this school

- The school is larger in size than most primary schools.
- Pupils are taught in mixed-age classes, apart from in the Reception Year.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority) is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is well below average.
- In 2015 the school met current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- At the time of the inspection, both the headteacher and deputy headteacher were absent through long-term sickness. The deputy headteacher has resigned with effect from Easter and the headteacher has resigned with effect from the end of the summer term. Another senior leader was on a phased return following a period of extended sickness.
- The school is currently being run by two interim headteachers who share the workload. One is the executive headteacher of The Horizons Learning Federation, consisting of two local schools, Holywell CofE Primary and St Helen's Primary School, Bluntisham. The other is the headteacher of Elton CofE Primary School.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed learning in 50 parts of lessons, half of them jointly with the interim headteachers.
- The inspection team heard pupils read and, with the interim headteachers, looked closely at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspection team looked at a wide range of the school's documents including development plans, policies, self-evaluation reports and safeguarding records. They considered evidence of the school's partnership work and the information provided for families.
- A meeting was held with a group of older pupils chosen at random and with members of the school council. Discussions were held with senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers and other staff on a wide range of subjects, including safeguarding arrangements and their professional development. The lead inspector talked to the Chair of the Governing Body and five other governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors considered 76 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, including 72 written comments. The inspection team also spoke informally to some parents.

Inspection team

| | |
|---------------------------|------------------|
| Nick Butt, lead inspector | Ofsted Inspector |
| Andy Maher | Ofsted Inspector |
| Marek Kraznicki | Ofsted Inspector |

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