

Marden Primary School

Goudhurst Road, Marden, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 9JX

Inspection dates	9–10 March 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	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and other senior leaders have worked diligently to improve the school and address the issues identified at the previous inspection.
- The school is now good because of the strong progress pupils make from their starting points. At the end of both Key Stages 1 and 2, they attain in line with national expectations. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good. Teachers regularly check how well pupils are doing in their class and usually adapt work to suit pupils' needs.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and they behave well both in lessons and around the school. Pupils say they feel safe and well supported in this nurturing school.
- The school prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effective. Leaders work hard to ensure that all groups of children, including those from communities whose circumstances have made them hard to reach, are quickly integrated into school life.
- Governance is effective; governors are skilled and very supportive. They closely monitor progress information to ensure that the school continues to improve.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive. The vast majority would recommend the school to another parent.
- From below-average starting points, children in the early years make good progress. The proportion who achieve a good level of development is in line with the national average. Children are well prepared for their learning in Year 1.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Leaders do not make sure that every pupil is fully challenged to make the best progress that they can.
- Those who have special educational needs or disability do not always have work of the right level of difficulty, especially in Years 2 and 3.
- Pupils who do not spell well do not have enough chances to practise their skills.
- There are still some gaps in the attainment of disadvantaged pupils when compared to their classmates, especially in Year 3.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders should ensure that all pupils are fully challenged to make even better progress by:
 - checking that those pupils who have special educational needs or disability always have work of the right level of difficulty, particularly in Years 2 and 3
 - giving those pupils who have difficulties with spelling greater opportunities to practise their skills
 - closing remaining gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others, particularly in Year 3.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher has worked hard to successfully create a positive climate for learning. Although there has been a period of staff turbulence, senior leaders have been determined to make the changes needed. The issues identified at the previous inspection have all been addressed and pupils now have high aspirations and make good progress.
- The ethos of the school is open and friendly. Leaders and staff are particularly effective in reaching out to some harder-to-reach communities to ensure that pupils' attendance remains as high as possible and that they are given every chance to succeed.
- Parents praise the school; they say that staff are always welcoming and listen to any concerns that they may have. They are pleased with the regular information they are given about their children's progress and value teachers' tips on how they can support learning at home. The large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to other parents.
- Staff are highly positive about working at the school and agree that it has improved a lot since the last inspection. Arrangements for managing the performance of staff are effective. Middle leaders play a useful role in supporting and coaching those who are new to teaching. All teachers are constantly challenged to improve. They are given ambitious targets based upon leaders' monitoring of their teaching and the progress pupils make in their classes. Teachers' skills are also enhanced through useful collaboration with local schools regarding additional professional training.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is successfully promoted. The school teaches a varied range of subjects, which enables pupils to develop a range of skills. These are further enhanced by a broad range of extra-curricular activities. Around the school, artefacts from history (for example, a Victorian sewing machine) give pupils a deeper understanding of what life was like in previous times. Pupils are encouraged to learn about the school's rural environment. Identification charts and nest boxes around the grounds enable pupils to learn more about the birds that live in the local area. Pupils regularly experience the work of artists and poets. Those in Years 3 and 4, for instance, explored the work of the artist Edvard Munch.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They have interesting lessons about the different faiths of the world. The school's values of aspiration, nurture and respect underpin every aspect of daily life. Events such as 'Black history month' enable pupils to develop their understanding about the need for tolerance and respect. In school, pupils from different cultures and backgrounds mix happily together.
- Primary physical education and sports funding is used effectively to increase teachers' expertise by working with specialist staff. Pupils participate in a range of competitive events and inter-school games in the local area. As a result of the additional funding, pupils have developed a greater understanding of healthy lifestyles and the need for physical well-being.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to ensure that disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as possible. Pupils receive additional support from teachers and learning support assistants who encourage them to 'have a go' and not be frightened about getting an answer wrong. The success of this strategy was evident last year when a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils, when compared nationally, made more than expected progress in mathematics.
- Leaders responsible for special educational needs and disability usually ensure that pupils have work of the right level of difficulty. However, there were occasions during the inspection when this was not the case and this had an impact on the progress pupils were able to make, particularly in Year 2 and Year 3.
- Leaders value the support and challenge of the local authority. Regular visits have focused on the areas that need to be improved.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are very committed to challenging the school to continually improve.
 - There are regular meetings that monitor all aspects of the school's work, including the quality of teaching and its impact on learning. Minutes show that governors have a good understanding of how pupils are doing in the school because many come into school on a regular basis. Most governors have also had useful training on the school's performance information.
 - Governors carefully monitor the school's finances, including the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and how it is helping these pupils achieve.

- The performance of staff, including that of the headteacher, is effectively managed. Decisions on pay increases are based on challenging targets and there are clear criteria for moving up the pay scale.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There are robust procedures for checking the suitability of staff. Staff are well aware of the latest guidance on keeping children safe. As a result of effective working with key partners, all pupils are well cared for. Regular training is organised so that staff know how to spot any potential threats to pupils' safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection. This is because teaching is much more consistent, allowing for pupils to make good, although not outstanding, progress.
- Teachers have a secure subject knowledge. They plan lessons carefully so that pupils can build on the skills they have learned. Pupils say they enjoy their lessons and that teachers have high expectations about the attitudes to learning that are expected in lessons.
- Effective teaching of reading throughout the school ensures that pupils use their skills to read increasingly difficult texts. There are frequent opportunities for pupils to consolidate their reading skills as numerous volunteers assist on a regular basis.
- Writing skills are carefully developed. In all year groups, pupils' work shows a growing love of writing. In some classes, such as Unicorns, imaginative writing is sparked by the class name. It is used as the basis for developing a fantasy world of forests and mythical creatures. In other classes, emotive photographs encourage pupils to empathise and express their feelings. For example, in Years 5 and 6, pupils responded to a picture of hungry children by writing comments such as 'Empty stomachs roar like a wintry fire.' Staff are constantly trying out different ways to help pupils improve. The recently introduced 'purple polishing pens' provide an opportunity for pupils to refine and improve their writing.
- Teachers are spending more time this year on developing pupils' skills of punctuation and grammar. However, pupils who have difficulties with spelling are not given sufficient opportunities to practise their skills and hence, progress in spelling is still variable.
- In mathematics, good teaching ensures that pupils grasp concepts quickly and are able to use a range of strategies to solve problems. Teachers make effective use of practical resources. This was illustrated in Year 1 where both mathematical equipment and toys were used to help pupils learn about halves and quarters.
- Learning support assistants provide valuable help, especially to those who are lower attainers. They question pupils carefully to pick up on any misunderstandings.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The headteacher is available at the gate every morning to talk to parents about their children and deal with any concerns. Staff, pupils and parents agree that personal development is strong because the school helps pupils to become confident in their abilities both academically and socially. Pupils help one another and are kind, considerate and helpful.
- Pupils' physical and emotional needs are given a high priority by staff, who are fully trained in all aspects of safeguarding. Pupils receive clear information and advice about how to keep themselves safe when using the internet.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying and say that it is rare. They know that they could ask a teacher or learning support assistant if they had concerns.
- Attendance is typically similar to the national average. However, last year there were high rates of persistent absence, particularly for those who had special educational needs or disability and disadvantaged pupils. The school has acted swiftly to remedy this situation and current attendance of all groups of pupils is improving.
- The breakfast club enables pupils to make a nutritious and friendly start to the day.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are motivated to behave well through the house point system which they helped to develop. Over time, there have been very few recorded incidents of inappropriate behaviour.
- There are frequent opportunities for pupils to take responsibility, such as becoming house captains and school councillors.
- In the playground, at lunchtimes and around the school, pupils show responsible attitudes. They report that the 'concerns box' allows them to confidentially tell senior staff if they have any worries.
- During lessons, pupils were seen to behave well and listen carefully to the teacher. However, behaviour is not outstanding because some pupils reported that their learning in lessons can be affected by the behaviour of others.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils' achievement has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Last year, pupils' progress was similar to that of all pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.
- In 2015, the proportions achieving the expected level in the Year 1 phonics (linking letters with sounds) screening check was lower than the national average. Leaders acted rapidly to address this issue and all staff had additional training to improve their subject knowledge. Current pupils now make a good start to understanding the sounds that letters make in both the early years and in Year 1.
- Last year, at the end of both Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils attained standards that were similar to the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Current pupils' books show that this continues to be the case. Pupils' progress is a little uneven across year groups. Particularly strong progress is made in Years 5 and 6 as a result of highly effective teaching that is very carefully matched to pupils' abilities.
- The most-able pupils make good progress. All who attained Level 3 in reading and mathematics at Key Stage 1 made expected progress by the end of Key Stage 2. Larger proportions than found nationally achieved the higher Level 5 in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6. Pupils are well prepared for their entry into secondary school.
- Those who are disadvantaged usually make good progress because the school carefully tracks their progress against their peers. In some classes, disadvantaged pupils make better progress than their classmates. These include in Years 2 and 6 in reading, in Years 1, 2 and 4 in writing, and in Years 1, 2, 4 and 5 in mathematics. However, in Year 2 last year, there were some large gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils. This year these pupils are in Year 3, and although gaps are starting to close, disadvantaged pupils are not making rapid enough progress for gaps to close quickly.
- Pupils who do not attain as well as others and those with special educational needs or disability generally make good rates of progress from their starting points. In Key Stage 2 in 2015, pupils who had special educational needs or disability attained better than the national average in mathematics and broadly similar to the average in reading and writing.

Early years provision

is good

- Children start in the Reception classes happy and relaxed due to the effective links that leaders have formed with parents. Leaders ensure that these home-school links grow ever closer throughout the Reception year. As a result, parents gain the information to effectively support their children's learning at home in reading, writing and number.
- The early years leader has ensured that there are careful checks when children enter the school. Overall, children's skills and abilities are below those typical for their age, especially in communication and language. In 2015, children made good progress and achieved in line with the nationally expected levels. They entered Year 1 as well-prepared and confident learners. Early indications are that children currently in Reception will achieve similarly.

- Children who have special educational needs or disability, including those who have speech and language difficulties, are very effectively supported. There are good links with a range of external agencies. Additional funding for those who are disadvantaged is used appropriately by leaders. Last year, a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils reached a good level of development in listening and attention when compared with others in the class.
- In the mornings, children settle quickly to activities and concentrate hard on tasks such as forming letters correctly. Children behave well and listen carefully to the teacher. There are strong relationships with staff who continually ask children questions and invite them to explain what they are doing. This encourages children to think more deeply about their learning.
- Exciting trips to local museums give children the opportunity to extend their understanding of what happened in the past. Staff ensure that children are kept safe during trips because they plan carefully beforehand to consider all potential risks.
- Where teaching is most effective, children's specific needs are always clearly met. In mathematics, for example, children learned about length by practical activities such as ordering dinosaurs. Those who were most able had harder tasks to complete. However, in common with the rest of the school, children are not fully challenged all the time to make the strongest progress. This is why the early years is not outstanding.

School details

Unique reference number	118306
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10002353

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	267
Appropriate authority	the governing body
Chair	Julie Scott
Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge	Malcolm Goddard
Telephone number	01622 831393
Website	marden.kent.sch.uk
Email address	office@marden.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 November 2013

Information about this school

- Marden Primary School is slightly smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Children in the early years are taught in two full-time Reception classes.
- The majority of the pupils are White British. Other ethnic backgrounds include Romany or Gypsy and 'Any other White' backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is lower than that found in most schools. The pupil premium is additional funding provided by the government for those pupils eligible for free school meals in the last six years, pupils who have been looked after continuously for one day or more and those pupils who have been adopted from care.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is much higher than the national average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes. There were 16 lessons and part lessons visited, many of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with two groups of pupils and inspectors looked at work in books and listened to some pupils reading. Inspectors considered the 43 responses to the online pupil questionnaire. There were also informal discussions with pupils at break time regarding what it was like to be a pupil at this school.
- Inspectors took account of 62 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire and also spoke to parents at the end of the school day.
- The views expressed by members of staff in the 14 online questionnaires were considered.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation and policies including the school improvement plan. Information about the performance of the school in comparison with other schools nationally was considered, along with documents about pupils' current attainment and progress. Documents checking the quality of teaching and learning and records relating to behaviour, attendance, child protection and safeguarding were also examined.

Inspection team

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Sue Quirk	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Murphy	Ofsted Inspector

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