

Palmarsh Primary School

St George's Place, Hythe, Kent CT21 6NE

Inspection dates	15–16 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

- Palmarsh is a welcoming, caring and inclusive school. Leaders make sure that every child, whatever his or her needs, is involved in all aspects of school life and has equal chances to succeed.
- The headteacher leads the school very effectively. With senior leaders and governors, she has taken successful action to improve the school since the previous inspection.
- The quality of teaching and learning has improved and is now good. Teachers plan interesting work which engages and challenges pupils of all abilities.
- As a result of good teaching, outcomes for pupils have improved. Pupils now make good progress.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They feel safe and well looked after in school.
- There are good, trusting relationships between pupils and staff. Pupils enjoy school, have positive attitudes to learning and want to do their best.
- The curriculum engages and motivates pupils to learn very effectively.
- Children get a good start to school in the early years. They make good progress and are ready to continue their learning in Year 1.
- There is a strong team spirit in the school. There is a shared determination to forge further improvements.
- Parents are very positive about the school and the support given to their children to thrive personally as well as academically.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There are some inconsistencies in teaching and learning. At times, pupils are not given enough opportunity to think about their learning and to deepen their skills, knowledge and understanding. Consequently, some pupils do not make the rapid progress they are capable of.
- New subject and middle leaders have not yet had enough time to fully develop their roles to have a full impact on further improving pupils' outcomes.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning so that all pupils make the rapid progress over time of which they are capable by ensuring that:
 - pupils are challenged sufficiently to further develop the depth of their knowledge, skills and understanding across a widened range of subjects
 - pupils have opportunities to reflect on their learning and increase the depth of their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Ensure that new subject and middle leaders develop in their roles to strengthen the impact of their work on pupils' outcomes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher provides effective leadership for the school. Her dedication, high expectations and skills have led to marked improvement in all aspects of the school's work since the previous inspection.
- The headteacher is well supported by her deputy headteacher and leader for pupils who have special educational needs or disability. Together, they make a strong senior leadership team. Their determination that every pupil should receive the best possible learning experiences has been successfully communicated to all staff. This has resulted in a positive ethos where pupils are nurtured and strive to do the best they can. Staff morale is high and, as one member of staff commented, 'It is a pleasure to work in such a positive environment.'
- The appointment of an experienced senior leader for pupils who have special educational needs or disability has increased senior leadership capacity, as well as ensuring good provision and management for this group of pupils. As a result, pupils with special educational needs or disability achieve well.
- Senior leaders' and governors' own checks on the school's performance in all areas of its work are accurate. There is no complacency but an ambitious drive with clear direction for further improvement.
- The quality of teaching and learning is regularly checked. Leaders identify weaknesses promptly, ensuring appropriate support is given and improvement is expected.
- The local authority has effectively supported the school to forge improvements in practice through training and monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and pupils' progress.
- Leaders, including governors, benefit from the strong collaboration with a group of schools to share good practice and provide external views of the quality of the school's work.
- Parents are positive about the school's work. They particularly appreciate the school's nurturing and caring atmosphere. Most parents who completed the online questionnaire would recommend the school to other parents.
- One of the main factors that has had a positive impact on pupils' achievement is the inspiring and motivating curriculum introduced since the previous inspection. Teachers plan well so that learning is linked across various subjects to provide meaningful and memorable experiences.
- The curriculum is enriched with a wide range of additional activities including visits, visitors to the school and clubs, which pupils thoroughly enjoy. These activities help pupils to learn new skills and make a positive contribution to their personal, as well as their academic, development.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well and underpins all that the school does. Leaders ensure that pupils are effectively prepared for life in modern Britain by encouraging staff and pupils to adopt fundamental British values in all that they do. A culture of respect and tolerance is fostered through the school's values, assemblies and the curriculum. Pupils learn about and celebrate different religions and cultures. Almost all pupils, in their responses to the pupil questionnaire, agree that the school encourages them to respect people from other backgrounds and to treat everyone equally.
- The school is, with justification, proud of its inclusive nature. It serves a diverse community. Pupils have a range of needs, skills and attributes including some with complex special needs. The leader for special educational needs and disability also works as the family liaison officer to support pupils and their families, who may be vulnerable, to reduce any barriers to learning. The headteacher, senior leaders and all staff 'go the extra mile' to ensure that every pupil participates in all aspects of school life. This demonstrates leaders' commitment to promoting equal opportunities for all pupils.
- Additional government funding is used wisely to ensure that the needs of disadvantaged pupils are met effectively. The gap between their progress and that of other pupils is closing rapidly and in some cases has been reversed.
- Subject leaders have made an increasingly positive contribution to school improvement since the previous inspection. They know the strengths and areas to develop in their subject from checking pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. However, some leadership roles are shared with senior leaders and other subject leaders are relatively new to these responsibilities. As a result, the impact of leadership at this level on pupils' outcomes is variable.
- Teachers respond well to the many opportunities to further develop their skills through a range of training. This helps to meet identified school priorities and develop individuals' skills. Teachers who are at the beginning of their careers commented very positively on the quality and range of support received from leaders to enhance their teaching skills.

- The school makes good use of the primary physical education and sport funding in a range of ways to enhance the existing good provision for physical education. These include providing a broader range of sport and competitive opportunities and additional after-school clubs, resulting in increased participation by more pupils. For example, pupils who had not previously attended clubs were motivated to attend a 'street dance' club. Specialist coaches work with teachers and pupils to enhance their skills and, therefore, improve outcomes for pupils.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors provide good support and effective challenges for school leaders. They share the ambition and aspirations of the headteacher and senior leaders to ensure that the school continues to improve.
 - The governing body has a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and the key priorities for further development through information from the headteacher, analysis of pupils' progress information and their own monitoring visits.
 - Governors' strategic decision-making since the previous inspection has had a positive impact on increasing leadership capacity.
 - The governing body expects to see evidence of the quality and impact of teaching on pupils' progress to justify any promotion and pay increases.
 - Governors are clear about how additional funding, including the pupil premium, is used and check to make sure that it is making a difference for pupils.
 - The chair of the governing body is determined to ensure that the governing body reviews and further improves its effectiveness in holding the school to account for its performance.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Senior leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding requirements are fully met. Procedures are robust and regularly checked to ensure they are complete and up to date. All staff and governors are trained and aware of their responsibility to protect children and ensure that Palmarsh is a safe place.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection. As a result, pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics have improved and are good.
- Teachers and teaching assistants know the pupils well. There are good, trusting relationships and, consequently, pupils are confident to try things out for themselves, take risks and become resilient learners. They know that their opinions will be valued and that teachers will always take time to explain if they do not understand something.
- Teachers plan lessons which are stimulating and memorable, have increasingly high expectations for pupils' achievement and challenge pupils well. Pupils have good attitudes to learning, work hard and are proud of their achievements.
- Curriculum planning ensures that there are good opportunities to develop reading, writing and mathematical skills in a range of subjects and these meaningful links support pupils' learning. Pupils say that this helps make their lessons interesting and it is ensuring that pupils have opportunities to apply their skills.
- Pupils work together well and support each other in lessons. Their good behaviour and personal skills help them to make good, and sometimes outstanding, progress.
- Pupils in Year 5 and 6, for example, worked out for themselves how they would conduct an investigation into the properties of materials. They had lively discussions about conducting a fair test. They listened to each other's ideas and opinions with great respect and maturity, even though they did not always necessarily agree with each other. Skilled questioning from the teacher helped to check on pupils' learning and understanding of scientific concepts and promoted a depth of knowledge, understanding and skills.
- In a spelling session, pupils were working well together. They were making decisions about which words to check with each other and giving thoughtful comments if any errors were made. They were successfully developing the accuracy of their spelling.
- Senior leaders' focus on developing an approach to assessing pupils' progress has been very effective and is understood and used by all teachers. The school's policy for marking and feedback is used consistently across the school.
- Sometimes, however, pupils are not given enough opportunities to reflect on their own progress so as to think about how to increase the depth of their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Teachers work closely with senior leaders to check on the progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils.

They quickly identify any pupils or groups who may be falling behind, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability. Appropriate additional support is provided, either in class or out of lessons, which enables them to make good progress and catch up to the best of their ability. Skilled teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning, especially to engage and meet the needs of those who may be struggling.

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 school is a very caring community. All staff know the pupils very well and, as a consequence, pupils' individual and often complex needs are supported very effectively. One parent commented, 'The staff are so caring, enthusiastic and dedicated to ensuring that the children's well-being is nurtured alongside their academic progress.'
- The care and respect shown by adults provide a good model for pupils who in turn care about and are respectful towards each other and adults. The inspector was impressed with pupils' good manners and friendly attitudes and the pupils' willingness to talk about their school and their learning. One pupil said that the best thing about school was that everyone knew each other and, 'You can make the best friendships that will last for the rest of your life.'
- Pupils say they feel very safe in school. They are confident that if they are worried about anything, adults will listen to them and help them. They speak confidently about how to use the internet safely.
- Pupils know that bullying can take different forms and say that it rarely happens in the school but if it does, teachers always sort it out quickly. A group agreed with one pupil who said, 'Sometimes people fall out with each other but it's not bullying and we always make it up with our friends.' Another said, 'We don't have bullying here because we're all friends.' Pupils know they are safe to learn without any type of discrimination as they know that any language or actions that may cause offence would not be tolerated.
- Pupils are taught how to stay fit and healthy. During the 'healthy eating, healthy living' week that took place during the inspection, pupils demonstrated their growing awareness of healthy and unhealthy foods.
- Pupils enjoy their responsibilities in the school and take them seriously. Older pupils are good role models for the rest of the school. For example: Year 6 peer mediators provide guidance to others at lunchtime, playground buddies play with the youngest children, singing leaders promote singing games in the playground and an active school council gathers the views of others.
- The breakfast club is well attended and provides a safe, healthy and social start to the day. Pupils are actively engaged in interesting and meaningful activities, for example conducting a survey of favourite types of bread, which they had been baking. For some pupils, joining the breakfast club has helped to improve their punctuality and attendance.
- Pupils new to the school say they were quickly made to feel welcome and included. One pupil said, 'I really didn't like going to school before and I was sad but now I've got lots of friends, the teacher helps me and I'm happy to come to school.' A parent also commented, 'Palmarsh has really helped my children settle after moving schools. It is warm, welcoming and the staff are amazing.'
- All the parents who responded to the questionnaire agree that their children are happy at school, feel safe and are well looked after.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves well in the playground, at lunchtimes and around the school. They take notice of the peer mediators who help to resolve any minor disputes in the playground at lunchtime. Older pupils say that behaviour in the playground is better than at the time of the last inspection. Most pupils who responded to the questionnaire agree that pupils behave well in lessons; however, a small minority feel this is not always the case. Sometimes, as seen when the whole school gathered for an assembly, behaviour is exemplary.
- Most pupils behave well in lessons and respond well to teachers' instructions. School records confirm that behaviour in class is good over time. Pupils know and understand the school's behaviour system and are clear about what is expected because they were involved in writing the rules. The few pupils who have specific behavioural needs are managed well and consistently by staff, in line with the school's policy and procedures.

- Leaders work relentlessly to ensure that pupils attend school regularly, and current attendance has improved to be broadly in line with the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils' progress has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Pupils' work in their books and the school's information about progress show that pupils currently in the school make good progress from their different starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.
- All groups of pupils achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics although progress is a little uneven between year groups. It is strongest in Year 5 and 6. This is a result of strong teaching over time, evident from the learning seen in pupils' books. Pupils make good progress in a range of other subjects including science, art, music and sport.
- Caution needs to be taken when interpreting published data due to the small and fluctuating numbers in Year 2 and Year 6. For example, in Year 6 in 2015, one pupil represented approximately 7% of the group.
- In 2015 by the end of Year 6, all pupils had made at least the expected progress in mathematics and writing and almost all had done so in reading. The proportion of pupils who made progress that was better than expected nationally was above the national figures in reading, writing and mathematics and particularly high in writing.
- All pupils reached at least the expected level of attainment by the end of Year 6 in mathematics and writing and almost all did so in reading and in grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Pupils enjoy writing and become skilled at writing in a range of styles for different purposes. For example, a group of pupils agreed that they had really enjoyed writing a balanced argument linked to their current topic of Egypt.
- From the Reception class, pupils are developing their handwriting well, in line with the school's preferred model and so by key stage 2 work is mostly well presented. Standards in spelling and grammar have also improved significantly and pupils write with a greater degree of accuracy in these areas.
- The proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics (linking sounds and letters) screening check has increased over the past three years and in 2015 was well above the national average. Pupils use their phonics skills well to help them read unfamiliar words.
- Reading for enjoyment is promoted well across the school and pupils develop as fluent, expressive readers. Pupils and some parents commented enthusiastically on the reward system, which provides pupils with an incentive to read at home and encourages them to read more. Pupils talk with enthusiasm about favourite authors and styles of writing and give thoughtful reasons for their opinions. One pupil commented, 'Reading helps me write my stories and I like building pictures in my head.'
- Improvements in teaching have lifted achievement in mathematics. Pupils learn how to use an increasingly wide variety of calculations to solve mathematical problems as they move up through the school. The oldest pupils confidently draw on a range of strategies to help them tackle more complex tasks in some depth.
- In 2015, pupils' attainment by the end of Year 2 was broadly average. Progress was good given their starting points, but some pupils who found learning more difficult did not have time to catch up and achieve at the expected level for their age. More pupils than found nationally reached the higher levels in reading and mathematics.
- The most-able pupils currently in the school are generally challenged to achieve well. In 2015, just under half of the Year 6 group reached the higher levels in mathematics and reading and just over half did so in writing and in grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- In 2015 there were too few pupils who had special educational needs or disability to comment in detail on their attainment, but they made equally good and sometimes better progress than others in the school and other pupils nationally.
- In 2015, disadvantaged pupils achieved as well as others in the school and better than others nationally in mathematics and writing but not quite as well in reading.

Early years provision

is good

- Children start in the early years with skills and knowledge that are below those typical for their age. They make good progress in the Reception class and are well prepared to continue their learning in Year 1.

- In 2015, the proportion of children that reached a good level of development was above that found nationally. During some disruption to staffing earlier this academic year, leaders ensured that children's learning remained paramount and achievement has remained good.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good. Although relatively new to the school, the experienced, skilled teacher has quickly built good relationships with children and parents. There is a warm, welcoming and friendly atmosphere which helps children settle well and they quickly learn the routines of the school day.
- There are good procedures to get to know the children and their families before they start, so that there is a smooth transition into school. One of the private nursery settings that some children attend wrote in praise of the links forged by the school. Nursery staff appreciate the invitation to visit the children once they have started and, as the school says, 'the opportunity to discuss and evaluate our practice and ensure we have given our children and families the best possible start into their school life'.
- Consistent and effective teaching of phonics ensures that children develop a secure knowledge and use of early reading and writing skills. For example, children used their good phonics knowledge to sound out and label the motorbike they had constructed, using words such as 'spark plugs'.
- Children behave well and enjoy showing adults their work and talking to them. Children are motivated to learn and want to explore and find things out for themselves. Activities are planned that capture the interest and imagination of the children so they develop a love of learning. The outdoor area has been developed well and provides opportunities for learning in a range of areas including promoting children's physical skills and imaginative play.
- The early years leader is relatively new to the role. Leadership is effective, however, as it is supported by the headteacher. Leaders ensure that all the safeguarding and welfare requirements appropriate to this age group are met. Children are kept safe and learn how to keep themselves safe. All the necessary actions are taken to support any children whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.
- Accurate assessments and their good knowledge of each child's needs help staff to plan the next steps for children's learning.

School details

Unique reference number	118490
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10002352

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	118
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kenza Bowman
Headteacher	Sara Wakefield
Telephone number	01303 260212
Website	palmarsh.kent.sch.uk
Email address	headteacher@palmarsh.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	28–29 November 2013

Information about this school

- The school is smaller 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 above average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is above 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 current government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school provides a daily breakfast club.
- There are two pre-school providers on the school site but these are private providers and, therefore, not included in this inspection.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning in all classes. Most of the observations were conducted with senior leaders, the headteacher or the leader for special educational needs.
- The inspector talked to pupils about their work and looked at the work in pupils' books. She observed pupils at playtime and lunchtime and asked them for their views on the school. She also talked to pupils about reading and listened to some pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs leader and other staff with key leadership responsibilities.
- Discussions were held with the chair of the governing body, three other governors and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector 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.
- The inspector looked at the 20 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, which included 13 written comments, and three letters written by parents. She also took account of six questionnaires returned by staff and 50 returned by pupils.

Inspection team

Margaret Coussins, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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