

Home Farm Primary School

Shelley Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 4JL

Inspection dates 14–15 June 2016

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The leadership of the headteacher and the senior leaders in the school is outstanding. Systems to monitor and improve the quality of teaching are exceptionally well developed and highly effective. This has ensured that the school has continued to improve since the last inspection.
- Leaders at all levels model the school's strong ethos of high expectations and aspirations. As a result, pupils participate in their learning with enthusiasm and a determination to challenge themselves and each other.
- Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics continues to be significantly above the national average at key stages 1 and 2. The presentation of pupils' work does not showcase the high quality of its content.
- From different starting points, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least good and often outstanding progress. As a result, gaps in their attainment in relation to pupils nationally continue to close.
- Teaching is consistently good and much is outstanding. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their learning through effective questioning. Teachers plan numerous opportunities for pupils to share their ideas, which they do very effectively. The quality of the debate that pupils have with each other is impressive.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are polite, courteous and very proud of their school. They work and play well together and are keen to support each other in lessons and during their playtimes. Their positive attitudes to learning are making a significant contribution to outstanding achievement throughout the school.
- Children in the early years have a great start to their school life. The exciting and nurturing environment has ensured that children make at least good progress in all areas of learning. As a consequence, the proportion of children who reach a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year has been above the national average for several years.
- The school's curriculum includes a wide range of exciting opportunities that pupils eagerly respond to. Exciting themes, visits and experiences are used to develop pupils' basic skills in English and mathematics across a wide variety of other subjects and to a high standard.
- Pupils say they feel safe and enjoy coming to school, and that the adults in the school take good care of them. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and the great lengths everyone in the school goes to, to ensure that their children achieve well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers consistently apply the school's handwriting and presentation policy so that pupils show well the high-quality content of their work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Leadership and management are exceptional at all levels, including in the early years. The headteacher provides very effective leadership. He and his team have ensured that the already good standards at the school's previous inspection have continued to improve. High expectations and the ethos of 'believe, inspire, grow' are clearly evident in all that the school does.
- Senior leaders work relentlessly to improve the quality of teaching so that it is never less than good and is often outstanding. Systems to improve, monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching are highly effective, ensuring that the leadership of teaching and learning is exemplary. Support and challenge between all staff is part of the school's way of working. As a result, the best provision is put in place for pupils. Leaders are passionate about grasping every opportunity to develop their own expertise for the benefit of their colleagues and, most importantly, the pupils. All staff support each other and truly work as a cohesive team. Support and training are carefully identified and well planned to address whole-school and individual needs. This is a 'learning school' where the collective experience and knowledge of staff is regularly shared with other local schools and vice versa. It is clear that all staff have found this two-way professional development very beneficial.
- Leaders at all levels, including newly qualified teachers who are viewed as potential leaders, are well supported and held rigorously to account for their work. English, mathematics and science are led very effectively, ensuring that basic skills are developed very well across all subjects. Other subject leaders know the strengths and priorities for development within their areas of responsibility. As a consequence, pupils' good progress is evident in all subjects.
- Senior leaders and governors are right to be proud of the school's ever-expanding curriculum which 'brings learning to life' in line with the school's motto. Pupils are involved in developing the curriculum and their own learning. For example, following the school council's request that pupils could learn to cook and try out foods from different cultures, this is now part of the curriculum. A further range of opportunities increase pupils' engagement: food is grown by pupils in their garden and then eaten; pupils can deposit their 'savings' in the pupil-led school bank; and they design experiments to see what provides the best compost for their allotment. Pupils are eager to talk about the richness of these experiences, many of which 'will help us in our lives out of school'. Work on being an energy-efficient, 'eco-friendly' school has resulted in awards. Displays of pupils' work are of high quality and in a range of subjects like mathematics, storytelling, art, French, information and communication technology, history and science.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is outstanding and contributes enormously to the welcoming ethos created by the whole school. Inspectors were welcomed into each class by pupils who explained what was being taught and how it had come about. Opportunities to increase awareness of issues outside the school, in modern Britain and in the wider world, are used well. Pupils' election to various roles of responsibility directly mirrors those in a local election, with pupils sharing their manifesto of what they hope to achieve during their time in post. Pupils support charities abroad and locally, for example raising money to educate a child in Uganda. They learn about other cultures and how to deal with possible conflict in pupils' experience.
- A strong emphasis is placed on independence, challenge and resilience, which not only develops pupils' spirituality and skills of reflection very well, but has also ensured that pupils display exemplary attitudes to learning.
- Use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is very effective because staff know the precise needs of pupils exceptionally well and check regularly that what is put in place for them is working. As a consequence, these pupils continue to grow in confidence and make progress similar to, and often much better than, their peers. Pupils are given many opportunities to develop their skills and talents across areas of the curriculum other than English and mathematics, with several examples of pupils excelling in sports, information technology and music.
- The school makes very effective use of the additional funding for sports development. Specialist coaches from Colchester United Football Club and the Philip Morant School have developed staff's skills and ensured a long-lasting legacy of this additional funding. Pupils also receive high-quality coaching in football, rugby and netball, and compete locally at a higher level than previously.

- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They appreciate the strong and approachable leadership of the headteacher. Many parents took the time to speak with inspectors or complete Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. They commented on how well all adults teach and care for their children, and say they often go beyond what is expected. This was confirmed by inspectors during the visit. Leaders go to extraordinary lengths to ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for. One parent speaking about her child commented, 'Home Farm have put so much in place for his future. He is now in a good position for secondary school.'
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body has been effective in securing improvements since the last inspection. Several governors have seen the school through its journey over a considerable number of years. The governing body has been proactive in 'benchmarking itself against other local schools' and gaining an external view of their own school. As a result, they are clear about what skills they would like to recruit to the two current governor vacancies.
 - Governors know about how the school is performing and the quality of teaching in the school. They are regular visitors to the school, meeting with pupils and staff, observing learning in lessons and looking at progress in pupils' books. This, alongside very comprehensive assessment information that is shared in the headteacher's termly report, is used to check on improvements.
 - Leaders at all levels are held to account, challenged in the regular visits governors have with leaders or during governing body meetings. The first-hand knowledge governors have, and that which they gain from attending training and school events, gives them a very thorough understanding of the school's work. Along with all staff, governors are involved in determining judgements in the school's self-evaluation and in deciding which priorities for improvement are appropriate for the following year.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are exemplary. Appropriate checks are made on the suitability of staff to work with children. The headteacher and senior leaders are tenacious in following up any concerns in pursuit of the safety, care and well-being of the school's most vulnerable pupils. Records are meticulous and individual pupils' support is very precise and detailed with a well-documented chronology of actions. All staff and governors are very well trained, including in the 'Prevent' duty, and effectively identify any safeguarding concerns. The headteacher teaches first aid to the key stage 2 pupils and all staff are first-aid trained, including some in paediatric first aid. Rigorous risk assessments are carried out by staff and leaders, including those necessary for the school's swimming pool which are completed daily.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Teaching is at least good and much is outstanding across the school, including in the early years. As a result, pupils often make outstanding progress during their time at school. Teachers plan lessons that are interesting and exciting, which ensure that pupils engage fully in their learning. The high expectations that all adults have of pupils enable them to become confident, resilient and interested learners.
- Teachers use the school's new and rigorous assessment system very effectively to identify what pupils know, understand and can do, and to ensure that pupils are given the right amount of support or challenge. The information teachers gather is the topic of regular discussion among colleagues. The quality of dialogue, decisions that are subsequently made and the regular checking of pupils' progress ensure that pupils attain well and make at least good and, more regularly, outstanding progress in a variety of subjects including English, mathematics and science.
- The excellent subject knowledge of adults enables them to challenge pupils and, through incisive questioning, encourage them to think more deeply about their learning. Teachers' feedback helps pupils to systematically build their knowledge and understanding. Teachers use questioning skills exceptionally well to guide pupils in their learning, tease out answers and address any misconceptions. In one lesson seen, the teacher confidently stopped the class, saying 'You don't understand this yet, let's look again.' She promptly explained in a different way and pupils were then able to articulate clearly what they were learning, clearly used to having to do so.
- Pupils are routinely identified who need additional support, time to practise a particular skill or simply the opportunity to explore an idea in a smaller group. As a consequence, support staff are deployed very effectively and flexibly according to pupils' identified needs. The partnership between teachers, learning support assistants and key stage leaders is highly effective in spotting any pupil who is struggling or at risk of falling behind their peers.

- The teaching of English is extremely effective and is reflected in the use of sophisticated language as pupils move into Years 5 and 6. Pupils throughout the school are proficient readers using their well-taught phonics (the sounds that letters make) skills to help them when they need to.
- Pupils' writing skills are very well developed in a wide range of subjects because teachers expect the same standard of written work in all lessons. Pupils are increasingly using the writing techniques they explore in their reading and, as a consequence, are becoming proficient 'authors'. Pupils write confidently for a range of different purposes and contexts, and from a very early age. For example, in one class where pupils were exploring personification, a Year 4 pupil explained that 'hunched houses coughing' could mean that 'the houses are all squashed together with smoke coming out of the chimneys'.
- Leaders have developed an approach to the teaching of mathematics and science which has ensured that both subjects are taught very effectively from the youngest to the oldest pupils. Teachers expect pupils to think carefully about how to solve problems and work out hypotheses. As a result, the vast majority of pupils demonstrate good understanding and application of mathematical skills and scientific knowledge, and are always ready to challenge themselves. For example, for homework, pupils can choose the level of challenge that they think best suits them. Often they go for the 'hot chilli challenge' and are willing to have a go, remembering the school's mantra that to 'fail' is to undertake the 'first attempt in learning'. Pupils are keen to explore and problem-solve and work well in pairs and small groups to do so, showing levels of maturity beyond their age.
- Pupils' books show how pupils are developing their understanding, knowledge and skills of a wide range of subjects through stimulating themes, visitors to the school and outside visits. For example, pupils went to the local town hall, had a palaeontologist workshop at the school and explored the history of the Tour de France. Pupils say they enjoy their learning which was evident during the inspection.
- Handwriting and presentation are not yet of a consistently high standard. This sometimes masks the excellent content of pupils' written work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils' understanding of how to be successful learners is exemplary. They settle quickly, are enthusiastic and constantly reflect on their learning, challenging themselves and supporting others.
- Pupils know the many forms that bullying can take and say that bullying is extremely rare. They know whom to go to if they have any concerns and the 'buddy' approach that the school uses, among others, is highly effective. Pupils are clear that 'there are no bullies here and everyone looks out for everyone else'.
- The headteacher and special educational needs co-ordinator are particularly adept at working with outside agencies and have developed a useful relationship with them. The identification of vulnerable pupils is highly effective and additional support is, therefore, extremely thorough and well documented. The very regular liaison between all adults ensures that these pupils' progress is tracked well and amended if appropriate as regularly as is necessary. Leaders are relentless in their efforts to ensure that all pupils are well cared for.
- Regular attendance remains an area on which leaders place high priority. Good attendance is celebrated throughout the school. Pupils excitedly wait to see if their class has won the 'attendance bear', the successful class appearing in the headteacher's newsletter. Pupils say they enjoy coming to, and are happy at, school. This has resulted in current attendance being above the national average. For an increasing proportion of pupils, attendance is 100% including pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Pupils are proud of their school and their work. They arrive at school punctually, smartly dressed in their school uniforms and ready for the day ahead, which they say is always 'brilliant and fun!' They would recommend the school to anyone because 'it is a family' and 'all our ideas are listened to'.
- Pupils enjoy and take very seriously the additional responsibilities that many have. Pupils elect the school and eco-council members, head boy and girl, and house captains, all of whom carry out their duties with care and a determination to do their best for the school. Some have 'shadowed', for example the catering staff, to see what their job entails and some pupils are now 'mini-middays'. As part of the duty of an eco-councillor, pupils regularly pick up litter, ensure that paper is recycled and use the unused fruit, vegetable and weeds to make compost. These actions, and those of other pupils with responsibilities, are regularly reported in assemblies and discussed in classes.

- The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Parent View, and those who spoke with inspectors reported that their child is safe and well cared for in school. Pupils say they too feel safe at all times and know how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils conduct themselves in an exemplary manner both inside and outside the classroom. All pupils are involved in writing their class 'citizens' charter'. As a consequence, pupils stay within the boundaries that they have collectively set. Leaders also play their part, ensuring high expectations and a common and consistent approach to behaviour management.
- Pupils of different ages play well together and support each other extremely well. Pupils in Year 6 'buddy' younger children. Reception class children said that they really like this because 'they are our friends'. It was also clear from the Year 6 pupils that they find this responsibility very rewarding.
- There are meticulous records of the very few incidents of poor behaviour that have occurred during the last three years. Resulting actions with pupils are followed up by leaders, as is effective liaison with parents. One commented on the 'brilliant communication with parents'. The school's reward system of house points, and the regular opportunities that leaders provide to reinforce such behaviours as 'respect', support a culture of high expectations of pupils to make the right choices.
- Pupils are keen, enthusiastic and conscientious learners who value the feedback that adults and pupils give them. In one lesson, two pupils were helping each other to complete the life cycle of a butterfly. One pupil said to another who was struggling, 'Do you want to try again?' When she was then successful, the pupil duly congratulated her with, 'Yes, that's it!' Pupils enter into a true partnership of learning when they work in pairs or triads, each offering thoughts and challenges, but listening respectfully to their peers. This is clearly the way that this school 'works' on a daily basis.
- Parents strongly agree that pupils enjoy school, behave very well and are very well cared for. As one parent put it, 'The children seem to bounce into school happy and bounce out happy too.' Parents have great confidence in the leaders and teachers and welcome the regular opportunities they have to hear about their child's progress. For example, the 'open classrooms', termly parent meetings and the 'parent forum' meetings.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- Pupils make outstanding progress from their various starting points. They enter the school with broadly typical levels of development for their age. By the time they leave key stage 2, a high proportion of pupils have made good in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6 in 2015 was significantly above age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. This position has been sustained since the previous inspection. The proportion of pupils who achieved more than expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics from the end of key stage 1 was above the national average. Analysis of pupils' work and learning endorses the school's information which indicates that the progress of pupils in Year 6 in 2016 is likely to exceed that of 2015.
- In 2015, pupils in Year 2 achieved significantly higher than the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of pupils making good progress from the end of the Reception Year to the end of key stage 1 was high.
- The proportion of pupils in Year 1 in 2015 who achieved the expected standard in the phonics check was in line with the national average.
- The school's own assessment information, work in pupils' books and observations of learning evidence that the proportion of pupils throughout the school who are making more than expected progress is considerable and is growing year on year. This reflects the school's unrelenting determination to ensure that the quality of teaching is strong in all year groups.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are provided for extremely well. The team that works with these pupils is highly effective. As a result, these pupils make rapid gains academically and in their confidence, often progressing at a rate that exceeds their peers.

- At the previous inspection, it was identified that there were not enough pupils attaining higher standards. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics has risen since the last inspection. In 2015 at key stage 1, this group's attainment was significantly above the national average. At key stage 2, it was at least in line with national averages. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, most-able pupils in all classes respond enthusiastically to the stimulating challenges presented to them and, indeed, provide each other with competitive but good-natured challenge.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils throughout the school is in line with or exceeds their peers in reading, writing and mathematics. There were too few pupils at the end of Year 6 to comment on this group's attainment in 2015. The gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers continues to close as pupils move through the school.

Early years provision

is outstanding

- Children enter the school with starting points that are broadly typical for their age and make significant progress during their time in the Reception class. This ensures that children are ready for Year 1. In 2015, the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development was considerably higher than the national average and had risen since 2014. This is because the leadership of the early years provision is outstanding.
- Leaders ensure that there is highly effective liaison between the 19 nurseries and pre-schools whose children attend Home Farm, their parents and the school. Home visits prior to starting school, 'learning journey afternoons' and an open-door policy ensure that leaders swiftly identify any gaps in children's development. Very effective adult support and provision are put in place to ensure that all children make good progress.
- Children organise themselves very well. They take turns when playing a game, share the toys and equipment appropriately and quickly move to 'free-flow' tasks, beginning them straightaway with minimum support.
- Well-planned, linked activities around a theme stimulate children's interest and engage them for increasingly long periods of time in a variety of activities. There is a real buzz in the Reception class. All adults know the children very well and 'seize the moment' with incisive and encouraging questions. For example, a group of excited children were doing a 'bug hunt'. When asked where they might look next, one child said 'underneath things'. 'Why do you think bugs go under things?' asked the adult. This was animatedly discussed by several children who decided it was 'because it's cosy under there and they feel safe'.
- Adults model very positive and supportive relationships, which children copy. Children listen well to adults and each other, and are keen to discuss what they are finding out or learning. Consequently, they eagerly share, for example, their writing, which is of a high quality, or what they have been counting when measuring using their 'caterpillars'. Children were fascinated by the live snail which had found its way to the toy castle, which they then examined using a magnifying glass.
- Staff keep meticulous records of what children have achieved. Leaders make good use of the good parental support that has been carefully nurtured. The display in the classroom of learning outside school and children's 'learning journals' evidence the strong partnership that continues to develop between home and school. As a result, children's progress is rapid and learning is planned appropriately.
- A significant proportion of activities take place in the well-equipped and exciting outdoor area. Number, language, art, science and physical development are carefully planned for. Children take every advantage to freely move from one learning area to another, guided and well supported by adults. Any small misconceptions are used well as a teaching point, children being asked to repeat, for example, the correct pronunciation of 'thorax' when discussing a butterfly.
- Leaders take seriously their duties to ensure that all aspects of health and safety in the early years are compliant with requirements. This creates an environment in which children feel safe and secure, and, just as importantly, manage their own risks. For example, playing with the 'mucky slime', one child noted that there was a container on the floor which she would need to pick up 'so that no one falls over it'.

School details

Unique reference number	114752
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10003674

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	211
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marilyn Rivett
Headteacher	Richard Potter
Telephone number	01206 577 430
Website	www.homefarm.essex.sch.uk
Email address	admin@homefarm.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	16–17 November 2010

Information about this school

- Home Farm is an average-sized primary school whose pupils come from East Colchester. The school is oversubscribed.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and there are very few pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the additional pupil premium funding is below the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support the progress of pupils eligible for free school meals or children looked after.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of those pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress at the end of key stage 2.
- The school runs its own breakfast club, 'Hungry bites', which is available to any pupil.
- The school has achieved many awards for a variety of aspects of its work, including the International Schools Award, Enhanced Healthy Schools Award, RHS Colchester in Bloom Award and the Schools Mark from St John Ambulance.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 17 lessons, a number of which were joint observations with the headteacher. In addition, inspectors made numerous shorter visits to lessons and attended an assembly.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, special educational needs co-ordinator and other members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also met with the chair of the governing body and four other governors, a group of pupils and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors heard some pupils read from Years 1, 2 and 3.
- The inspection team examined a range of evidence, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, the systems to track pupils' progress, and samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at policies relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding, and the school's records of monitoring of teaching and performance management information.
- Ofsted's Parent View responses of 43 parents were considered alongside the school's own surveys from staff and pupils.

Inspection team

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