

Highfields Primary School

Colchester Road, Lawford, Manningtree, Essex CO11 2BN

Inspection dates

5–6 July 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

- Outstanding leadership at all levels has ensured that the school has improved significantly since the last inspection. The school now provides outstanding education.
- The governing body carries out its role very effectively. Governors are highly skilled. They use their detailed understanding of the school to hold leaders rigorously to account for the standard of education provided.
- Subject leadership is well developed. Leaders work exceptionally well together and have a considerable impact on improving outcomes across the curriculum for all pupils.
- Pupils' outcomes are outstanding. Overall attainment is very high at the end of key stages 1 and 2. Pupils make outstanding progress from their individual starting points.
- Due to high-quality teaching, the proportion of pupils who achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check by the end of Year 1 is considerably higher than the national average.
- Teaching assistants are very effective in their work. The pupils they support make substantial progress both academically and socially.
- The provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is very well led. These pupils make excellent progress over time from their individual starting points.
- Leaders ensure that pupils are extremely well cared for. Pupils feel safe and know how to stay safe. They rapidly acquire the skills necessary to become confident learners.
- The skilfully planned curriculum provides wide-ranging opportunities for pupils to deepen their knowledge and develop their understanding across many subjects. As a result, pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- The early years provision is outstanding. Children get off to a flying start to their education at Highfields Primary School.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers in all year groups have equally high expectations for the standards pupils achieve in the presentation of their written work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The widely respected headteacher provides outstanding leadership. She has communicated her vision with great passion and clarity. As a result, adults work exceptionally well together and have been successful in their aim of making Highfields Primary School 'an exciting place to learn, rich with experiences that prepare children for later life'. The sentiment of one pupil that 'school is like one big family' was echoed by not only her peers throughout the inspection, but also by adults working at the school.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is detailed and accurate. It informs the clear, concise improvement plan. Leaders, at all levels, have a precise knowledge of the quality of education across the school. Importantly, they share an understanding of how each aspect of their work fits into the overall plan to provide outstanding education for pupils. This teamwork ensures that improvements continue to be made to the excellent work already taking place, with minimal disturbance to learning routines.
- School leaders accurately monitor the quality of teaching and, supported by the governing body, challenge practice that is not good enough. Teachers reflect on their own practice and enthusiastically seek out opportunities to learn from other colleagues within school and elsewhere. As a result of this, and a well-thought-out training programme, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved dramatically since the previous inspection.
- Leadership is exceptionally well established. Subject leaders, together, play a central role in the continuing improvement of the school. These highly motivated leaders closely monitor the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress in their individual subject areas. Using this information, these leaders work together to take appropriate action to make sure that any pupils who fall behind are given the necessary support to catch up quickly. As a result, pupils make excellent progress across the curriculum.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is expertly led. One parent commented that the school 'provides everything my daughter needs and then adds more'. The special educational needs coordinator makes sure that teachers and teaching assistants are very well trained to provide learning activities that are precisely matched to the needs of each pupil. Pupils' needs are quickly and accurately diagnosed and strategies are put in place to help them make at least good and in many cases better progress.
- Under the impressive leadership of a senior manager, and the careful scrutiny of governors, pupil premium funding is very effectively used. The progress of each pupil is carefully tracked and, if they fall behind, appropriate support is put in place, according to need. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make at least the progress expected of them and often better.
- School leaders have skilfully planned an interesting and balanced curriculum. This not only provides equality of opportunity for all pupils, but also is laced with activities designed to deepen pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills across a range of subjects. Topics are well chosen to enable pupils to delve deeply into differing cultures from Britain and around the world. Pupils talk with confidence about how this information is helping them to 'understand what other people experience' and 'to respect different cultures'. Together, leaders regularly review the curriculum and make perceptive alterations to ensure that pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education. For example, the astute decision to work in partnership with a local retail business has helped the subject leader of design to develop pupils' skills through designing and then preparing healthy meals.
- The curriculum is vibrantly enriched by a wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. One pupil explained that 'we have lots of chances here'. Inspection evidence supports this view. Pupils develop not only their music, art and sculpture skills, but also a deeper knowledge of the lives and times of the artists that they study. Pupils' learning is enhanced by interesting talks and visits to museums, towns and the coast, all of which enable pupils to gain a wider understanding of the world in which they live. It is a distinctive feature of this school that leaders do everything they are able to do to make sure that all pupils have access to these opportunities, irrespective of their personal circumstances.
- The very effective physical education (PE) coordinator ensures that the PE and sport premium is used imaginatively. For example, coaches lead additional tennis, football, dance and cricket sessions for pupils. Teachers are provided with specialist training in the teaching of dance, gymnastics and athletics. Pupils also have the opportunity to participate in sports that are new to them, such as lacrosse and orienteering.

As a result, PE teaching is of a high quality and greater numbers of pupils than in the past take part in sports clubs. School leaders are rightly proud that all of the 130 pupils who undertook externally run fitness tests were accredited with having achieved 'full fitness'.

- The headteacher is committed to offering the best opportunities to her staff and pupils and actively seeks partnerships with other schools and agencies to enable her to do so. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the opportunities that being part of the local schools' partnership has brought. Through this and other collaborative work, teachers have been able to share best practice, assure themselves of the accuracy of their assessments and provide even more opportunities for the pupils at Highfields Primary School, for example in providing musical workshops to enable the most able pupils to work alongside those from other schools.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance is highly effective. Under the leadership of the perceptive and knowledgeable chair of the governing body, governors provide dynamic strategic leadership.
 - Using the knowledge gathered from visits to the school, communication with parents, staff and pupils, and reports from leaders, as well as those from external agencies, governors support the headteacher in taking actions to hold school leaders to account for the quality of education provided.
 - Governors possess the skills and knowledge necessary to provide precise and well-judged challenge to school leaders. Inspection evidence demonstrates that, through this aspect of their role, governors have helped to maintain the school's pace of improvement. For example, they provided additional resources to ensure that Year 6 pupils received extra support to help them to make outstanding progress.
 - Governors ensure that performance management practice accurately reflects the school's policy.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are highly effective. Records, including the record of pre-recruitment staff checks, are meticulously maintained, monitored and updated. Leaders ensure that staff are appropriately trained in each relevant aspect of safeguarding. Adults know what to do if they have any concerns about pupils' welfare. Governors carry out the necessary checks to assure themselves that school leaders are meeting statutory requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- School leaders have created a culture in which teachers are highly motivated, reflective and are provided with a range of opportunities to improve their practice. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the last inspection and is now outstanding.
- Teachers make very effective use of the school's accurate information about what pupils are able to do to plan imaginative learning activities that challenge and interest pupils. For example, pupils of all abilities in a Year 2 mathematics lesson worked together with good-humoured energy as they sought to find the 'rogue number' in their work. They were able to apply their reasoning skills extremely well as they explained why they had made their particular choice.
- Teaching assistants are highly skilled in their craft. They are well prepared for each lesson because they communicate well with the class teacher about what pupils will be learning. Teaching assistants apply techniques developed in appropriate training to very good effect when supporting pupils. Through skilful encouragement, a key stage 2 pupil was able to speak enthusiastically and confidently about the 'unifying effect of the equal rights movement' in 20th century America.
- Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge and well-developed questioning skills to provide pupils with opportunities to demonstrate their deeper understanding of the topics that they are studying. For example, astute questioning enabled pupils in a Year 5 science lesson to demonstrate their deepening understanding of the reliability of the experiments that they were conducting.
- Mathematics is taught well. Teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to master their skills when working individually or in small groups. Pupils in a Year 5 lesson demonstrated great resilience when working collaboratively on activities that challenged all of them. One pupil explained 'I like a challenge', as she worked with tenacity to successfully solve a multi-layered mathematical problem.
- Phonics is taught exceptionally well. Teachers expertly model the techniques that they expect pupils to use. Due to the teacher's enthusiasm and use of interesting teaching strategies, pupils demonstrated great confidence when successfully sounding out unfamiliar words. The pupils' delight at their achievements was clearly evident. By using the techniques they have learned in earlier years, older pupils make very good independent use of their understanding of phonics and letter combinations to spell

complex words such as 'archaeological'.

- Teachers have a very good knowledge of the content and skills that pupils need to understand and develop in subjects other than English and mathematics. For example, due to the high-quality teaching they receive, pupils are confident and creative in their art work. They can clearly explain the techniques they use and have a broad knowledge of a range of artists and sculptors. Similarly, in science, teachers' enthusiasm and excellent subject knowledge enable pupils to make considerable progress.
- Pupils' communication skills are impressively developed. Teachers provide pupils with many opportunities to develop their written and verbal communication. As a consequence, pupils articulate their knowledge fluently. For example, in a Year 5 lesson, pupils were confidently composing and presenting speeches about the importance of equality. They did so with excellent enunciation and skilful use of expression.
- Each classroom is an inspiring environment in which to learn. Displays are bright, vibrant celebrations of pupils' successful learning. They serve as excellent points of reference for pupils during their learning.
- In a small minority of classes, teachers' expectations of how pupils should present their work does not match the high standards of the rest of the school. As a result, pupils' handwriting in these classes is not developing as rapidly as it is elsewhere.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- School leaders have been very successful in ensuring that pupils are well cared for and have the support that they require to become confident learners. Pupils make good progress socially and academically as a result. Effective strategies are used to support pupils who are in the care of the local authority to become confident learners.
- Compassion is one of the key values of the school. This underpins the way that adults approach their duty of care to pupils and is a distinctive feature of relationships at Highfields. Pupils are very appreciative of this and are clear that they can approach any adult if they have any worries. They are rightly confident that support is in place to help them resolve issues that might arise.
- Leaders have taken great care to develop robust systems to ensure that the school meets the individual needs of pupils who, for differing reasons, may be vulnerable. For example, the provision of a sensory room provides pupils with the space and time to reflect when the need arises. Adults are precisely trained in the specific needs of the pupils with whom they work. These adults are skilfully deployed to provide support not only in lessons but also at break and lunchtimes. They know each pupil very well and recognise when they need a helping or guiding hand. As a result, pupils make excellent progress in their personal development in a variety of learning and play situations.
- Pupils are very aware of the importance of acting in a safe manner. Each pupil spoken to explained that they were happy and safe at school. Pupils said that 'bullying is not something we are used to here'. Inspection evidence confirms this to be the case. Every one of the parents who responded on Parent View agreed that their child is safe and happy. Through taught lessons, visiting speakers and special assemblies, pupils are able to develop strategies to keep safe in a variety of settings. For example, pupils explained how to keep safe online or near water, roads or rail.
- Pupils know that their views matter at Highfields Primary School. The democratically elected school council makes meaningful contributions to the development of the fabric of the school, for example in having a clear say in the construction of the new music garden. As a result, pupils develop an excellent awareness of different aspects of decision-making. Pupils know these activities prepare them well for their futures. As one pupil commented, 'It helps us to develop life skills'.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are very courteous, polite and mix together extremely well. They move around the well-maintained school corridors cheerfully and maturely. At break and lunchtime they make energetic use of the well-supervised school grounds.
- Pupils value their education and understand the importance of attending school. One pupil explained that the thing he enjoyed most about school was 'learning'. This sentiment was echoed by his peers over the

course of the inspection.

- Pupils' behaviour in the classroom is nearly always as positive as it is elsewhere in the school. Almost all lessons are characterised by an enthusiasm for learning and pupils' desire to do their best. On the rare occasions that there is low-level disruption, it is managed well by the adults in the room and learning is largely unaffected.
- Attendance is above the national average. Pupils rarely miss a day and many explained how much they looked forward to each school day. Leaders monitor attendance with care and take effective action to improve the attendance of pupils who are at risk of missing too much of their education. No group of pupils is disadvantaged by low attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- School leaders have taken highly effective action to ensure that outcomes have rapidly improved since the previous inspection. Pupils' progress is tracked with precision. Where there is a risk of a pupil falling behind, appropriate amendments are made to teaching, and support for the pupil is put in place. Leaders use external agencies to validate the accuracy of the judgements that teachers are making about pupils' progress. Evidence from these accurate assessments and pupils' work demonstrates that outcomes are outstanding.
- Most pupils enter the early years with starting points that are typical for their age. However, a significant number have starting points that are lower. In 2015, pupil outcomes, at the end of each key stage, were significantly higher than the national average. Current information and pupils' work show that this outstanding achievement is continuing.
- In 2015, a very large proportion of pupils achieved the expected standard in the phonics screening check. This exceptionally high achievement has been repeated again this year. This is due to the high-quality teaching that pupils receive.
- In key stage 1, pupils' outcomes have, over time, been higher than the national average. Inspection evidence demonstrates that pupils currently make considerable and sustained progress from their individual starting points. Assessment information shows that pupils are on track to sustain this performance in 2016.
- The progress that pupils make across key stage 2 is outstanding. In 2015, outcomes were significantly higher than the national average. The progress that pupils made from their individual starting points was exceptional. In 2016, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standards in reading, writing, mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling is considerably higher than the recently published, unvalidated, national average. Pupils in key stage 2 progress equally well in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils, of all abilities, achieve well. In 2015, above-average proportions of identified pupils made expected progress and, in many cases, made better progress than expected. Inspection evidence demonstrates that outstanding progress has been maintained in the current school year. This is due to teachers' highly effective planning, and also to the additional support that these pupils receive.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make excellent progress from their individual starting points. Due to the exceptional support these pupils receive, the longer they are at Highfields Primary School the more rapidly they progress.
- The most able pupils make strong progress across a range of subjects because they are given opportunities that really stretch them and make them work hard. For example, in mathematics, the most able pupils are provided with higher-level challenges that enable them to develop and master their mathematical skills.

Early years provision

is outstanding

- Children make excellent progress from their individual starting points. The proportion achieving a good level of development is higher than the national average. This is because of the very high quality of teaching, care and leadership.
- Transition is very well managed. Children and parents are provided with opportunities to visit the provision before they start. For example, parents and children spend the morning in school and then have lunch with older pupils in the school. 'Special Friends' (older pupils who act as mentors to the children in

Reception) meet with children before they join the Reception classes. As a result, children settle into Highfields Primary School easily and make rapid progress.

- The leader of early years has a detailed knowledge of what the children can do and where they need support. She uses this information extremely well to make amendments to the curriculum and to teaching where necessary. As a result, children make considerable progress in areas such as physical development and communication. The leader of early years makes sure that each child's progress is carefully monitored on a daily basis. Adults are quick to notice where a little extra guidance is needed and use specific techniques gained through appropriate training to make sure that no child falls behind.
- Adults set the highest expectations of how children should behave and the children respond very well. Children quickly develop the confidence to make positive behaviour choices. They act in a safe manner and work exceedingly well together, politely taking turns and offering their support to those around them. For example, one child kindly fetched a seat for one of his peers so that he could take part in the learning at the writing table.
- Children are increasingly confident in their learning. They quickly develop the skills of reading, writing and mathematics. Children can explain the techniques that they are using and know when to use them. They apply these skills well. For example, one child helped his peers by pointing out 'there is a silent 'a' in weather, like the one in breakfast'. Children also approach each task with enthusiasm because the topics they learn through are well-chosen and interest them. When learning about the sea, one child was proud to show that she had written that 'the shimmering blue sea is sparkling'.
- The early years learning environment is a stimulating one in which to learn. Children learn well across a wide range of activities covering all seven areas of learning. The large outside learning area is well organised and of a similar high quality to the inside area.

School details

Unique reference number	114769
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10003395

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	318
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Malcolm Gentry
Headteacher	Mrs Hilary Cook
Telephone number	01206 392223
Website	www.highfields-essex.co.uk
Email address	admin@highfields.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–10 November 2011

Information about this school

- Highfields Primary School is slightly larger than an average-sized primary school.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and eligible for the pupil premium is lower than the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are in local authority care.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than the national average. However, the proportion with education, health and care plans or a statement of educational needs is higher than the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school's website complies with statutory requirements.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons in all classes. Many of these lessons were jointly observed with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. Inspectors observed learning taking place out of class for pupils who receive additional help with their work. Inspectors also visited tutor sessions, music rehearsals and the school's breakfast club.
- The inspection team carried out a scrutiny of the work in pupils' books and folders.
- The inspection team met with 10 pupils, five governors, the headteacher, senior leaders, six middle leaders and a group which included four teachers and one teaching assistant. An inspector also met with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors also observed pupils at break and lunchtime. Inspectors held informal conversations with many pupils over the course of the inspection.
- The inspection team checked documents including: the single central record of pre-recruitment checks, the school's development plan, documents relating to pupils' achievement and behaviour, minutes of governor meetings, records of checks on the quality of teaching, and the school's evaluation of its own performance.
- Inspectors took account of parents' views expressed in informal discussions in the playground as well as those of 71 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. An inspector also spoke to one parent separately on day one of the inspection.

Inspection team

John Lucas, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ruth Brock	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jennifer Carpenter	Ofsted Inspector
James Richard	Ofsted Inspector

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