

Holt Farm Junior School

Ashingdon Road, Hawkwell, Rochford, Essex SS4 1RS

Inspection dates

1–2 November 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Significant changes in leadership and staffing have slowed improvement since the school became an academy. Inconsistencies remain in achievement, teaching and behaviour that mean that the school is not yet good.
- Leaders have not yet gained a wholly accurate view of the work of the school. Changes in the way that the school collects its assessment information have hampered its ability to effectively analyse the progress of groups and so plan for further improvement. Plans for improvement lack detail and do not focus tightly enough on pupils' progress.
- Although attainment for reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 is improving, pupils across the school are not achieving as well as they could, particularly the most able.
- Teachers do not always use assessment well enough to plan sequences in learning that allow pupils to make the rapid progress that they need to. Parents do not always know where their children are in their learning.
- Teachers do not provide regular opportunities for pupils to write at length and to practise their basic English skills.
- Most teachers provide regular feedback in line with school policy. However, this is not always precise enough and, as a result, pupils are uncertain about how to make their work better.
- Although the situation is improving, pupils are not always keen to do their best in lessons. Their attitude toward work is inconsistent and many pupils do not achieve their full potential.
- Some leaders are new to post and have not yet had the opportunity to fully develop their role and make a difference to the standards achieved in their allocated subject area.
- Until very recently, governors have not successfully held leaders to account. Governors do not routinely check on how effectively additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used. They have not challenged leaders as to why some of these pupils are not making as much progress as they should be.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils' attendance is consistently at the national average or above. Pupils enjoy going to school and parents confirm that their children are happy at school.
- The quality of teaching is improving.
- Recent changes, driven by the effective leadership of the new head of school, are turning the school around quickly. Leaders have the confidence of staff, pupils and the majority of parents.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - eradicating weaker teaching
 - supporting all teachers to use assessment information accurately to inform their planning, especially for the most able pupils and disadvantaged pupils
 - checking that all teachers provide consistently high-quality guidance to pupils that makes it absolutely clear how pupils can improve their work
 - ensuring that teachers plan opportunities for pupils to write at length and to regularly practise their basic English skills
 - ensuring that spelling and handwriting are taught consistently well across the school.
- Improve the behaviour of pupils by:
 - ensuring that all teachers plan activities that engage and enthuse pupils with their learning
 - bolster the systems to improve pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons, ensuring that pupils develop greater levels of resilience in their learning
 - ensuring that teachers have high expectations of the presentation of pupils' work and that pupils take care when producing work in their books.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - using assessment information more regularly and effectively so that extra support can be given quickly to those pupils who need to catch up with their peers
 - embedding the roles of new and existing middle leaders so that they have a greater influence on improving teaching and share the responsibility for improvement evenly across the school
 - tightening improvement plans so that they accurately reflect the school's strengths and areas for development and focus tightly on the progress of all pupils
 - ensuring that governors routinely check and challenge leaders on how effectively the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is being used
 - developing further the partnership with parents to support their children's learning.

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

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Despite some progress since the school became an academy, the school is not yet good. The improvement journey got off to a slow start. There has been a number of changes in leadership and staffing, which have hindered the rate of improvement.
- Since her appointment in September 2016, the new head of school, supported by equally new key leaders, has accomplished much in a short period of time. She has high aspirations for the school and its pupils. However, she has not yet had enough time to gain a wholly accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development. As a consequence, improvement planning is not yet as well informed as it might be and does not tightly focus on pupils' progress.
- Leaders have become more meticulous in the way that they use assessment information. The head of school is now in a better position to use this information effectively to identify which groups of pupils across the school need support to catch up with their peers.
- The head of school makes regular visits to classrooms to check on teaching, look at books and talk to pupils. The feedback that teachers receive is specific and is clearly helping them to understand what they need to do to improve further. Support has been given in a variety of guises. As a result of her leadership and the commitment of staff, teaching is improving and achievement is steadily rising across the school. The head of school, supported by governors and the trust, has successfully eradicated any inadequate teaching.
- More effective systems to manage teachers' performance are now in place to raise expectations and ensure that staff have the skills to teach well. The head of school has identified training opportunities for individuals and for the school as a whole, such as recent work on improving the teaching of reading. She has sought and received good-quality advice from the trust, local authority and local schools.
- Middle leaders, many whom are new to post, are building their confidence and skills and are beginning to contribute to improving the quality of teaching, such as in mathematics and reading. However, there is much still to be done, of which they are aware and are very keen to get on with. At present, too much responsibility for bringing about improvement rests with the head of school. The new deputy headteacher, who starts in January 2017, will add to the capacity of this new team.
- Pupils receive good-quality support for their well-being. There is a range of strategies to help pupils overcome any barriers to their learning. The head of school works well with pupils and families to support them and ensure that they are in school and enjoying their learning. For example, as a result of the raising of the profile of the importance of attendance, this has improved for the vast majority of pupils and in particular for the most vulnerable pupils.

- Before the head of school's appointment, the use of the pupil premium had a variable impact. Not enough of this additional funding was used to support the learning of older pupils. She has improved the provision available to pupils and, as a result, some disadvantaged pupils are now making faster progress. However, there is still some way to go to ensure that they achieve as well as others nationally from similar starting points.
- Physical education and sport premium funding is used effectively to promote pupils' enjoyment of, and participation in, physical education. Pupils say that they enjoy the range of opportunities that are offered in school and in pre- and after-school clubs, for example, the gym club.
- The school sports partnership based at the local secondary school enables pupils to access gifted and talented workshops and specialist sports coaches. Participation in a physical education scheme and competitive sports, such as swimming, is also developing. The school has achieved the bronze award from the Youth Sports Trust, and pupils are more aware of their physical capabilities and their health and well-being. Staff have also benefited from increased staff knowledge of particular sports and have set up the sports council to continue to raise the profile of physical education in the school.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through an interesting, rich and broad curriculum. The walls are adorned with displays of pupils' art work from themes such as 'chocolate', 'Greek gods' and 'inventions'. These displays reflect the intention to promote enjoyment, fascination, understanding between right and wrong, and the consequences of actions.
- The curriculum is well planned to ensure that there are opportunities to link reading, writing, mathematical and science skills with those of other subjects such as history and geography. Opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual awareness are less well developed, particularly where teaching is less than good and the climate for learning is less well developed.
- Leaders challenge stereotypes and help pupils to understand a range of cultures. The school is committed to ensuring that pupils develop a good understanding of British values, which is developed effectively in assemblies. Pupils are aware of the importance of democracy and equality of opportunity because these are well taught. Pupils vote to elect representatives on the school or sports council, and to be head boy or girl. In so doing, pupils have a clear understanding of what being an ambassador for Holt Farm Junior School entails.
- The trust and local authority have both provided good support to the school to ensure that leadership of the school is more secure than it has been for some time. The quality of teaching and leadership has undoubtedly improved due to continued involvement with, and support of, leaders and governors.

Governance of the school

- Governors recognise that they could have held leaders to account more robustly in the past two years, as they indeed are now. They are more aware of their roles and responsibilities and have trust in the new leaders in the school. They have endeavoured to increase the membership of the governing body with only minimal success despite their best efforts. The onus has therefore been on a few committed and some very new but keen governors.
- Although governors are clearer about what to ask about teaching and pupils' achievements, they are not yet challenging leaders as effectively as they should. As a result, for example, they have not routinely checked on the effectiveness of the pupil premium funding on raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. They recognise that they need to be more closely involved with the new leader who is responsible for the pupil premium, and for special educational needs and/or disabilities. This will ensure that governors have a greater awareness of how funding is used and its impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Governors are beginning to make regular visits to the school to check on, for example, the effectiveness of safeguarding, and the behaviour of pupils. They know the improvements that have been made in both of these areas and can chart the progress well, although the journey is not well represented in the school's self-evaluation or minutes of meetings of the governing body. Linking governor visits more closely with key priorities is intended, and, with the tightening of the plans for improvement, governors welcome this clarity, which they feel will then enable them to report to the trust.
- The trust and governors recognise that there is still some work to do to ensure that they work as closely together and effectively as they can, so that leaders are held to account for improvement in the school's performance. The chair of governors is in regular contact with the chief executive officer of the trust. Although there are other procedures in place to regularly check on how well the school is doing, these are not yet being used to their best advantage. As a result, not enough clarity exists between the two about the school's precise strengths and areas for development and the evidence that supports this.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The head of school, who is the designated leader for safeguarding, ensures that training is up to date and regular, the latest training being in September 2016. For example, staff are aware of recent changes in guidance for keeping children safe, and have received training in the 'Prevent' duty so that they know how to spot signs of radicalisation.
- A member of the governing body works closely with the school and makes visits to see, for example, that appropriate checks are made to ensure the suitability of staff to work with children. The school responds well to being given guidance about the very latest regulatory changes. For example, as more qualified teaching and learning assistants are currently teaching classes, the requirement that they must have the same checks as teachers has been met.

- Risk assessments for school trips and for work carried out on the school buildings and grounds are thorough. Records are maintained effectively to ensure pupils' safety. Policies reflect the latest guidance and are largely up to date. Parents who do not have access to the school's website can see paper copies of policies in the school entrance. The school's website complies with the guidance on what schools and academies should show for public reference.
- The head of school ensures that all information regarding concerns, and meetings and phone calls with outside agencies, are well documented and that meticulous records are maintained. She has developed an effective relationship with the local authority's designated officer and is proactive in seeking advice.
- Pupils are kept safe and feel safe in school. They told inspectors that there is always someone to speak to if they are worried about anything. They know that there are different types of bullying and say that there is very little bullying at Holt Farm.
- The school provides useful information for parents about the safe use of the internet. Parents are given guidance on how to make a 'family agreement' with their children, which includes statements such as: 'We will make sure the children's favourite games are bookmarked for them to get to easily.' Pupils understand the possible risks when using the internet, and posters such as those in the computer suite are written in child-friendly language to make the messages very clear.
- The entrance and exit to the school are secure. The site manager mans the separate gate for pupils' use and the main gates are only open for deliveries to the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently good across the school. Not all teachers have equally high expectations of what pupils can achieve from their starting points. Some tasks do not challenge all groups of pupils, and so some, especially the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged, do not make the rapid progress of which they are capable.
- The majority of teachers in Years 5 and 6 use assessment very effectively. They regularly check on pupils' understanding during lessons and, as a result, reshape the learning where necessary to meet the needs of all pupils. However, this is not consistent across the school. In some classes, pupils are given tasks that are too hard or 'too easy', as was said by a group of pupils in Year 3. As a result, pupils become restless and do not maintain their concentration.
- Not all teachers follow the school's recently introduced marking policy. Pupils are therefore not always sure how to improve their work and so they repeat errors, for example in their spelling and grammar.

- Some teachers give teaching assistants good guidance and use their expertise well. As a result, these teaching assistants provide good support to pupils, asking pertinent questions and challenging pupils to think hard about what they are learning. For example, in one lesson, a teaching assistant challenged pupils to think about what 'splitting your sides' might actually mean in the context of what they were reading. In such examples, teaching assistants working with groups and individual pupils have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Consequently, these pupils make good progress socially, emotionally and academically. However, on occasion, deployment of teaching assistants is not as effective as it could be.
- Where teachers plan lessons that are engaging, involve pupils' active participation, and match activities well to the pupils' needs, pupils respond very well and with enthusiasm. For example, in one lesson, pupils were asked why 'My Friend the Enemy' was an interesting title for a novel. Pupils eagerly offered suggestions and debated among themselves. 'Because you don't think of a friend as an enemy,' said one boy. However, when tasks are not well matched to the needs of pupils, some pupils lose interest and talk among themselves when the teacher is speaking.
- The curriculum offers a broad range of subjects taught through exciting themes. Pupils are taught computing separately by a specialist. Inspectors saw pupils being given many opportunities to develop, practise and consolidate their computing skills. Good links with other subjects are also made, seen for example when Year 6 pupils were designing a video game, using coding and working with 'x' and 'y' coordinates. The curriculum is well supplemented by a range of lunch clubs, and before- and after-school clubs. These include clubs for football, gymnastics, running, tag rugby, tennis and dodgeball.
- Pupils of varying abilities who were listened to reading during the inspection said that they enjoy reading. They have a good range of reading material in the well-stocked reading corners within each classroom. In the best guided-reading sessions seen during the inspection, teachers developed pupils' comprehension skills, read good-quality texts to deepen pupils' understanding and planned for pupils to read for pleasure. Pupils do so, clearly engrossed in what they are reading, from comics to non-fiction books to books with an increasing number of chapters. 'I like reading as it helps me to develop my imagination,' said one pupil, while two others eagerly challenged each other to read with expression, 'because that's what makes it interesting!'.
- The teaching of mathematics has improved due to the sharing of good practice and the subject expertise of the head of school. Owing to a legacy of poor teaching, however, pupils have had considerable gaps in their learning and understanding. The head of school has supported teachers in the development of their subject knowledge in order to fill these gaps. Assessment information and pupils' books seen during the inspection show that this is bearing fruit. The appointment of the new subject leader, who is also a mathematics specialist, has already secured the continued development of this subject. Opportunities for pupils to use their reasoning and problem-solving skills consistently across the school are beginning to be evidenced.

- The quality of writing varies from class to class and across the school. Where teachers are clear about what pupils are learning, and clear about their expectations, writing is more successful. For example, in one lesson, pupils were writing in response to a picture of a stormy sea. Pupils could select the viewpoint from which they wrote. One chose to be the boat on the sea, and effectively wrote about 'being tossed about, soaking my wooden body'. However, such examples are too rare. Pupils are not given the opportunity to write at length and to develop their writing. Too often, pupils begin work and do not get to finish it. The quality of their work is also not good enough. There is no consistency in the teaching of handwriting or spelling, and teachers too readily accept work that is of poor quality.
- In some classes, pupils are encouraged to select different levels of challenge or to challenge themselves when they feel ready to do so. Extension activities and opportunities to 'mind map' what they already know and what they want to find out are well developed in these classes. Pupils are therefore encouraged to think hard about what they are learning. Where this is so, pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive. They are keen to extend their learning and show perseverance and enthusiasm for learning. An increasing number of older pupils use, to good effect, 'blob trees' to record their learning and self-assess where they are in their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders have ensured that there is good communication between all adults so that any pupils who need support or who are struggling get prompt guidance. The family support worker knows, and works well with, vulnerable families and pupils. This successfully helps parents and pupils to manage difficult situations and means that pupils are happier coming to school.
- Appropriate records are kept to ensure that all communication feeds into the school's safeguarding and care for pupils, especially those who are most at risk. The head of school, in her new role, has quickly established good partnerships with parents built on trust and their knowledge that pupils are very well cared for.
- Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. They know whom to talk to if they are worried about anything and have confidence that adults will keep them safe in school. Online safety is taught well and there are many helpful signs and posters which remind pupils about e-safety.
- Pupils learn in a variety of ways about being responsible citizens. The school council works for the benefit of all pupils and highlights pupils' wishes or concerns to leaders and governors. Pupils regularly raise money for chosen charities. For example, they raised the most money in Castle Point district for the Poppy Appeal, and raised £400 for the local children's hospice. Pupils collect groceries for local elderly residents who live on their own. Pupils are also keen to, 'help people who have nowhere to live because I know someone like this and they need help'. Inspectors observed a whole-school assembly based on the theme 'it's good to be green', where discussions took place about how well pupils can control their feelings. Pupils contributed well.

- Teachers have established clear routines for pupils to follow in class and when moving between classes, for example after a mathematics setting. Little time is wasted. Pupils respond well to the expectations that adults have set. The vast majority of pupils are engaged in the tasks that teachers give them, only becoming inattentive when the tasks are not challenging or interesting.
- The school environment is very bright and welcoming. Much work has clearly gone into ensuring that this is a good place to come and learn. Displays in the communal areas and corridors are beautifully presented, many reminding pupils of their responsibility for the school and their own actions, for example, the golden rules, what the school and sports councils do and celebration of good attendance. However, pupils' pride in the presentation of their own work in lessons does not reflect this positive environment. Too often, pupils' work in their books is scruffy, demonstrating little care or attention. This poor standard of presentation is accepted too readily by some teachers.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. Inspectors spoke with pupils about what they enjoy about school. One parent said, 'My children are very happy to go to school every morning and they like their teachers very much.' Pupils' attendance is good and is regularly above the national average in individual classes and across different weeks. Leaders plan transition work well both for pupils joining the school in Year 3 and for those who leave to go to their chosen secondary school at the end of Year 6.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Not enough pupils demonstrate that they have a good attitude towards their own learning, and some are not yet as receptive as they should be to learning. This is particularly the case where activities in lessons are either not interesting, or where they do not correspond appropriately to the pupils' ability. As a result, some pupils lose interest, become demotivated, and the quality of their work suffers.
- Leaders are working hard to implement and develop whole-school, positive attitudes to learning. The inspection team recognised, following careful scrutiny of behaviour records and looking at governor visit reports, that behaviour is an area where leaders have had some success in improving.
- Pupils have been given lots of opportunities to engage in different activities on the playground, including, for example, hockey and table tennis. There is a good range of fixed and loose play equipment to encourage social and physical development. Pupils use this well. They also value the relaxation room where they can go if they need to 'calm down'.
- Pupils are polite and courteous to visitors. They listen well to their peers and to most adults, and are keen to work together, which they do very well when given the opportunity.

- There are very good examples of exemplary attitudes to learning, for example, in Year 5. In several lessons seen during the inspection, pupils were encouraged to reflect on their learning, think about how they approached it, and take responsibility for it. In these lessons, there was a better response to their learning than in other lessons. Pupils challenged themselves, thought about what they could have done better, and responded really positively by doing just that.
- Pupils are clear about what good behaviour looks like because it is insisted upon by all adults. Pupils say that there is still some behaviour that is not as good as it could be but that, 'it is much better than it used to be,' and that teachers 'deal with it quickly'. Anecdotal evidence from teachers, parents and governors confirms this to be the case. Although some parents expressed concern about behaviour in the Parent View survey, inspectors found that pupils' conduct was very positive in classrooms, around the school and in the playground.
- Pupils are aware of the different types of bullying, including cyber- and racist bullying. There are very few recorded incidents of any type of bullying and, where these have occurred, leaders have taken swift action and followed appropriate procedures. There is very helpful information and guidance for parents on the school's website and the policy makes it crystal clear that the responsibility for dealing with any bullying is everyone's.
- The majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and those spoken to during the inspection were very positive about improvements in the school. They said that their children enjoy school and think it is, 'working towards being much improved on last year'. Inspection findings support that there are many improvements that are beginning to ensure that 'every child achieves', as the school's motto states.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Senior leaders in the past have not had high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly the most able. Leaders have focused too heavily on pupils meeting the expected level of attainment, rather than on the progress that individual pupils make from their starting points in Year 3.
- Assessment information demonstrating pupils' progress was not easily accessible during the inspection. However, current leaders recognise that previously pupils' progress was not tracked well enough. This is beginning to be done to ensure that any pupils who are at risk of underachieving or falling behind are quickly identified.
- In 2015, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected level of achievement at the end of Year 6 in mathematics was significantly above the national average. Attainment in reading and writing was at least in line with the national average. However, too few pupils attained the higher levels in writing, and the proportion reaching the higher levels in reading was significantly below the national average. Pupils making better than expected progress in writing was well below average.

- Disadvantaged pupils in 2015 attained less well than other pupils nationally in reading and writing. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils whose progress was better than expected was also below the proportion nationally. Higher attaining disadvantaged pupils are likewise not doing as well as they should.
- In 2016, pupils' attainment in writing and mathematics was above the national average. Reading, however, was below average, particularly for lower attaining pupils. The proportion of pupils who attained the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average. Current assessment information for pupils in the school, however, shows that this is unlikely to be the case at the end of Year 6 in 2017.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics and writing was significantly above the national average in 2016. However, the attainment and progress of pupils in reading were below the national average. Disadvantaged pupils attained less well than other pupils nationally, from similar starting points, in reading and mathematics. Progress for this group was below the national average in reading.
- The proportion of pupils who attained the new expected standard in grammar, punctuation and spelling in 2016 was below the national average, and particularly so for those who are disadvantaged. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard was well below average.
- Current assessment information and evidence seen in pupils' books show that an increasing proportion of pupils are making at least expected progress from their starting points in reading and mathematics. However, this is not consistent across year groups, between classes, within year groups and between subjects. Older pupils in the school make better progress than those currently in Years 3 and 4.

School details

Unique reference number	141170
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10022371

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	272
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Taylor
Head of school	Lucy Wass
Telephone number	01702 545131
Website	www.holtfarm-jun.essex.sch.uk
Email address	headofschool@holtfarm-jun.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- Since the school became an academy, it has experienced several changes of leadership. The current head of school has been in the role since September 2016. There have also been many changes in staff. The school has had considerable difficulty in appointing permanent teaching staff. New phase, English, mathematics and inclusion leads took up their posts in September 2016.
- The school is larger than the average-sized junior school and has increased in numbers since becoming an academy in 2014.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage and few speak English as an

additional language.

- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium grant is broadly in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average, as is the proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The school meets the government's provisional floor standards for 2016. These express the minimum expectations for what pupils should achieve by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 24 lessons and several parts of lessons to observe learning and to talk with pupils about their work. Most visits were with the head of school. Inspectors met formally with the head of school and three other leaders. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, including the chair, and the chief executive officer of the trust.
- Inspectors met with a group of 10 pupils and also spoke with pupils informally during lessons and playtimes. Inspectors also observed a whole-school assembly.
- Along with leaders, inspectors looked at a wide variety of pupils' work from this and the last academic year. Pupils' work displayed on walls was also viewed.
- Inspectors listened to a small group of pupils read, listened to others read during lessons and spoke with pupils about their reading.
- A thorough check was made by inspectors of the school's documentation on safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and the quality of teaching. Inspectors also considered the school's evaluation of its own work, its plans for improvement, information about pupils' progress and staff performance management information.
- Inspectors took into consideration the 34 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View and 37 texts. 18 staff responses were also considered.

Inspection team

Ruth Brock, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Judith Sumner	Ofsted Inspector
Liz Chaplin	Ofsted Inspector

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