

Aylesford Primary School

Teapot Lane, Aylesford, Kent ME20 7JU

Inspection dates

9–10 November 2016

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- This is a good school, due to the care taken by the hardworking and committed senior leaders and staff to help pupils learn and achieve well.
- Staff fully support the headteacher's vision for the school, which promotes the achievement of every pupil within a caring community.
- Parents are very positive about the school, as it promotes the high levels of care, support and enrichment that their children receive.
- Children make a strong start to their learning in the Reception Year. They make good progress due to the high expectations of their behaviour and what they can achieve.
- The effectiveness of teaching and learning in the school is generally good, resulting in pupils making good progress overall. Adults question pupils well to challenge their thinking and develop their understanding. However, there are some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and the progress made by some pupils, particularly the most able.
- Skilled teaching assistants support pupils' learning well during lessons and in small intervention groups. This enables pupils who need extra help to catch up and progress well.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are good. Pupils are polite, friendly and respectful to each other and adults.
- The school's work in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. This helps pupils to value diversity and respect the faiths and beliefs of other people.
- Pupils feel safe and enjoy the rich curriculum and interesting activities planned for them, including a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- The headteacher and assistant headteacher share all the leadership duties in the school and have too much to do. The Valley Invicta Academies Trust (VIAT) has had unrealistic expectations of how much the two senior leaders can achieve. As a result, monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning has fallen behind and some records about safeguarding are incomplete.
- The arrangements for governance do not currently provide sufficient oversight of the school. The local governing body does not have the time or information to support and challenge leaders effectively. Governors do not evaluate the impact of pupil premium funding fully. The improvement plan is not sharp enough.
- The trust has recently taken appropriate action to strengthen the governance and leadership capacity of the school. Although impact so far is limited, suitable plans are in place to drive further improvement.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership by:
 - significantly improving the quality of local governance of Aylesford Primary School
 - ensuring that VIAT officers, trustees and governors understand and fulfil their different accountabilities and responsibilities to oversee the school and offer effective support and challenge to school leaders
 - urgently increasing the operational leadership capacity at the school
 - improving the links between self-evaluation and action planning in order to have greater impact on outcomes for pupils
 - ensuring that leaders focus on the progress of all groups of pupils
 - making better use in the improvement plan of clear targets and descriptions about what will be achieved by pupils at key points in the year to enable senior leaders and governors to monitor the impact of their actions: this includes the impact of pupil premium funding on the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils
 - ensuring that the school is fully compliant with the information it is recommended to have on its website.
- Continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning, in order to further improve outcomes for pupils, by ensuring that:
 - tasks planned by teachers consistently offer sufficient challenge, particularly for the most able
 - all pupils respond as well to feedback about their work as they do in the most effective classes
 - the best practice is shared between teachers in the school.

An independent external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An independent 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

- There is insufficient leadership capacity at the school. There are two senior leaders and no middle leaders. The hardworking and committed headteacher is also the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), designated safeguarding leader, English leader and key stage 1 phase leader. The equally determined assistant headteacher is a full-time class teacher, deputy designated safeguarding leader, mathematics leader and key stage 2 phase leader. The VIAT officer and governors who devised this leadership structure had unrealistic expectations about what these two leaders can achieve under these circumstances.
- Senior leaders identified strengths and weaknesses in teaching accurately during their joint lesson observations and work scrutiny with inspectors. However, due to lack of time, the level of monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning by school leaders has slipped. This has led to a few inconsistencies between classes, as individual teachers' needs are not being identified and addressed promptly.
- Due to this limited evaluation, leaders' knowledge of their school's strengths and weaknesses is incomplete. Their self-evaluation reflects the many positives about the school, but sometimes is not as insightful about the areas identified for improvement as it should be. The school's improvement plan is a rather generic trust document and not linked closely to the areas which require improvement at the school.
- There is a single local governing body with advisory responsibility for the four VIAT primary schools and governors' meetings consider information about all four schools. As a result, these arrangements for governance do not provide sufficient oversight of this school. Governors are unaware of the school's self-evaluation and do not have a clear understanding about the progress of pupils at the school. The scheme of delegation which spells out the key responsibilities of the local governing body and officers of the trust is not well understood by governors. However, the joint chief executive officer with responsibility for the school has a sharper knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
- The chair of the trust and recently appointed joint chief executive are taking appropriate action to address the weaknesses in governance and leadership. The joint chief executive has led on the appointment of a primary executive headteacher, identified subject leaders and put in place a comprehensive monitoring plan. Each primary school will soon have its own local governing body to enable the necessary duties to take place effectively. These steps have not yet had a significant impact on pupils' progress and so leadership and management of the school requires improvement.
- Since it opened as an academy, teaching and learning at the school have improved considerably. VIAT led the introduction of systematic and effective learning programmes for reading, writing and mathematics. Implementation of these teaching methods has established consistent routines in lessons. The pupils know what to expect and this security is helping them learn well. Standards achieved are higher and rates of progress are good and improving for many pupils.
- Leaders and teachers have a detailed understanding about the attainment of individual pupils in the school and how well they have acquired new skills. Leaders' focus is on

enabling pupils to reach age-appropriate expectations. However, this threshold is achieved relatively easily by some pupils, particularly the most able. Leaders rightly recognise that they do not systematically check how well groups of pupils are progressing from their starting points. Although standards achieved by most pupils are rising, it is not clear whether the rates of progress of individuals and groups of pupils could be even better. For example, school leaders do not monitor the progress of groups of pupils, such as the most able, more closely. Similarly, they do not review sharply enough how well disadvantaged pupils progress, including the most able, compared with other pupils nationally with the same starting points.

- The school's information shows that the performance of disadvantaged pupils throughout the school is generally in line with others in the school. Last year, some pupil premium funding was used to improve the standard of writing by disadvantaged pupils. The impact of the rest of the funding has not been fully evaluated by leaders and governors, and plans to use this year's pupil premium funding are imprecise.
- In her role as SENCo, the headteacher knows the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities well, and their progress is reviewed regularly during pupil progress reviews. However, due to time constraints, leaders do not consistently review the impact of interventions put in place. Transition into new classes or new schools for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are very well planned and this helps them settle quickly and learn well.
- Visits and interesting activities enrich the curriculum and are used to capture pupils' interest very well. All classes visit the theatre and an art gallery annually. The curriculum is enhanced through lessons in drama, music and languages taught by specialist teachers from other VIAT schools. The strong curriculum is further enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities which are well attended by pupils.
- The physical education and sport funding for primary schools is spent judiciously to increase the number of pupils participating in sporting activities on a regular basis and to improve the expertise of both staff and pupils.
- The school's inclusive values thread through the ethos and culture of the school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Pupils are given good opportunities to reflect and question and are clear about the need to respect others. Pupils show a sound understanding of those with different faiths, or none, and are being well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Parents are extremely positive about the school. The vast majority say that their children are happy and make good progress at the school and believe this is because their children are well taught and cared for by the dedicated staff. Virtually all of the parents who responded to the online Parent View survey would recommend the school to other parents.

Governance of the school

- Governors do not have a strong grasp of their strategic responsibilities and are not compliant with current legislation in important areas of their work. For example, they have not kept their safeguarding policy up to date, or reviewed information about special educational needs. In addition, they have not rigorously evaluated the impact of pupil premium spending or ensured that the school website has all the information recommended.

- Lines of accountability between trustees and the local governing body and between the chief executive officer of the trust and the headteacher are unclear.
- The local governing body is not fulfilling the requirements of VIAT's own scheme of delegation. They do not know the school well enough to hold school leaders to account. However, the chief executive officer does have more insight.
- Only three governors have accessed external training, but internal training of governors has started and more is planned.
- The chair of the local governing body is committed to improving both the quality of governance and provision for pupils at the school. He welcomes the imminent creation of a local governing body for Aylesford Primary School. The external review of governance recommended should provide useful guidance for the reconstitution of the local governing body.
- Leadership and management of the school shows many strengths and there is convincing evidence that the trust is improving both governance and leadership capacity rapidly, and thus the overall effectiveness of the school is good.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective but there are areas in need of improvement. Leaders and governors have not ensured that staff are kept fully up to date with information about keeping children safe. The child protection policy has recently been updated to conform to statutory guidance and plans are in place for further training. There is a strong culture of vigilance throughout the school and staff, who know children well, are quick to report any concerns they have about children in the school. These concerns are acted on in a timely way and appropriate referrals are made to other agencies. However, notes of actions taken and next steps required are not recorded in a systematic way. Records of staff checks are managed efficiently.
- The large majority of parents feel that their children are safe in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers, including in the early years, have high expectations and provide tasks that interest pupils and encourage them to do their best. They model the values of respect and tolerance and expect pupils to cooperate, for example by talking in pairs about their work. Teachers praise pupils' efforts with enthusiasm and help them to be proud of their work.
- Clear routines and strong relationships between staff and pupils build high levels of trust and confidence and contribute to an orderly and calm environment. Where teaching leads to good or better achievement, skilful questioning encourages pupils to develop deep understanding, and this was seen in the early years and in both key stages 1 and 2.
- The teaching of phonics is strong, particularly in the early years and Year 1. As a result, pupils throughout the school are confident readers, reading fluently and with expression. There is a culture of reading for enjoyment in the school and pupils read in lessons regularly and every morning in DEAR (drop everything and read) time. Reading logs are well maintained and regularly completed by parents.
- Pupils are given a range of opportunities to write at length and apply new skills. There is a strong and effective emphasis on the teaching of handwriting and spelling. Pupils' work is consistently well presented.

- Teaching in mathematics is improving as teachers become more experienced in the delivery of a teaching method introduced just over a year ago. Pupils are increasingly able to apply their basic mathematical skills to solve problems. In a Year 6 lesson, pupils were working independently and confidently, grappling with problems of increasing difficulty and also happy to check answers with each other and seek advice. Important skills such as mathematical reasoning are developing because teachers pose interesting and challenging mathematical problems for pupils to attempt and increasingly expect them to explain their thinking. However, these expectations are not consistently high across all classes.
- Teaching assistants know the pupils well. Their questioning techniques skilfully support and challenge pupils' thinking and learning. They encourage pupils to work out answers for themselves. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to the support of pupils who need to catch up and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Where teaching is most effective, pupils are set tasks which provide opportunities to deepen learning and they can achieve well. In a well-designed Year 2 science lesson, pupils were able to articulate their learning using correct scientific vocabulary. Work in books shows that pupils in key stage 2 are required to use their understanding of scientific concepts to explain their observations accurately.
- Occasionally, teachers plan tasks that are not challenging enough. For example, at times, the most able pupils have to complete work at lower levels before going on to more challenging tasks so they do not make as much progress as they could. At other times, some pupils are presented with challenging tasks which they are not yet equipped to tackle, or moved on too quickly, before they have a secure knowledge and understanding of the basics. Sometimes, the priority is on supporting pupils who need the most help to reach the age-related expectation threshold, rather than on the progress of all pupils, including those unlikely to reach this standard and those who will meet it easily.
- Where teaching lacks sufficient challenge, particularly for the most able, pupils' attention begins to wander, and attitudes to learning are less positive.
- Teachers provide regular feedback in pupils' books, in line with the school's policy. However, pupils do not always make good use of this feedback to improve their work. As a result, some pupils do not make as much progress as they could.
- Teachers appreciate the professional development and training they receive. However, teachers do not routinely plan lessons together, including for classes in the same year. As a result, the best practice is not shared fully.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school is a happy place. The great majority of pupils enjoy learning and show pride in their school.
- Pupils take on responsibilities enthusiastically and enjoy contributing to school life. Year 6 peer mediators work well to support pupils who have worries or lack confidence.
- A very large majority of parents agree that their children enjoy school and feel safe.

- Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and know who to turn to if they have a concern. They are very clear about how to avoid danger when using the internet. There are no problems with racism, and derogatory language is rarely used. If bullying does occur, it is always dealt with promptly by staff.
- Healthy eating is strongly promoted and pupils enjoy school lunches.
- Great care is shown to all pupils, including impressive support for those facing challenges. Staff in the school show a determination to help every pupil overcome difficulties they face and work effectively with a range of outside agencies to ensure that pupils receive the care and support they require. This includes close liaison with the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller link worker.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite, courteous and welcoming to visitors.
- Pupils take pride in their work, their appearance and the school in general. They conduct themselves well around the school. The inspectors saw no low-level disruption during lessons.
- Occasionally, when teaching lacks challenge, some pupils' attention wanes and they lose concentration.
- Overall attendance is similar to national levels but the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is lower. Staff are working very hard to improve the low attendance of a few pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils enter the school with lower starting points than would be expected for their age. They go on to make good progress in a range of subjects, as a result of a well-designed curriculum and effective teaching.
- Children in the Reception class make strong progress in their reading, writing and number work because teachers work assiduously to meet their needs. In Year 1, pupils develop secure early reading skills as a result of the highly structured approach to teaching phonics. By the end of key stage 1, the proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics is above the national average.
- Published outcomes for 2015 show that pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2 was above national averages in each of reading, writing and mathematics and for these three subjects combined. Provisional outcomes for 2016 indicate that pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2 remains above the national average for reading, writing and mathematics combined. By the end of key stage 2 in 2016, pupils made similar progress in reading, writing and mathematics to pupils nationally.
- Leaders have rightly recognised that too few pupils at key stages 1 and 2 achieved outcomes at the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics. The most able pupils are not challenged to learn at greater depth consistently. School leaders do not track the performance of this group of pupils efficiently.
- There is some inconsistency in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. In 2016, at the end of key stage 2, disadvantaged pupils made better progress in writing and mathematics than in reading. However, disadvantaged pupils achieved almost as well as all other pupils nationally in reading at the end of key stage 1, while the most able disadvantaged pupils achieved higher outcomes in reading than their peers nationally.

- Most pupils currently in the school make rapid progress because teaching is well planned, stimulating and exciting. For example, in a history lesson, one pupil said: 'It's great because you can talk and learn at the same time.'
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress which is similar to that of their peers. This is because teachers and teaching assistants know and support them well, have high expectations and give them work pitched at the correct level.
- Pupils read aloud often, and do so with enjoyment, expression and fluency. The curriculum requires pupils to read and respond to a wide range of challenging books. Pupils make good progress in writing across the school, and this is evident both in published outcomes and in the work seen in books. Pupils write legibly and fluently, using increasingly complex vocabulary and sentence structures as they move through the school. In mathematics in all year groups, pupils make strong progress, because teachers focus on pupils' mastery of basic concepts.

Early years provision

Good

- Children enter the early years with skills and abilities that are a little below those typical for their age. Provisional 2016 information shows that the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development at the end of Reception Year was well above the national average. This represents strong achievement.
- This success is due to precise planning by the teachers who, together with teaching assistants, assess children's needs accurately and plan engaging activities designed to meet their learning needs. Disadvantaged children are making rapid progress.
- Children enjoy their learning. They behave well, cooperate with each other and show a growing respect for each other. The atmosphere is purposeful, children focus well and sustain concentration during more formal learning and when playing together.
- From the time they enter the Reception Year, children learn to follow routines and high levels of independence are encouraged. Relationships are strong; children have already learned to take turns, share and play happily together.
- The classroom is well resourced and supports a good range of play and learning activities. Bright displays reflect the breadth of the curriculum and celebrate children's work. The outside area builds children's skills well; they enjoy choosing activities and are engaged, motivated to learn and curious.
- Skilful questioning helps children to think deeply and work out solutions for themselves. However, the most able children are not consistently stretched and the teachers are beginning to address this.
- Adults are alert to any safeguarding concerns and show an awareness of the need to monitor vulnerable pupils carefully.
- Children are well prepared for Year 1 and transition is smooth.
- Adults work closely with parents and encourage them to help their children build on their learning at home. Parents who spoke to inspectors were very pleased with the progress their children are making through the early years.

School details

Unique reference number	140168
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10019846

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	261
Appropriate authority	Valley Invicta Academies Trust
Chair of the Local Governing Body	Carl Taylor
Headteacher	Vanessa Homewood
Telephone number	01622 718 192
Website	www.aylesford.viat.org.uk/
Email address	headteacher@aylesford-pri.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Aylesford Primary School is an average sized primary school.
- This was the first inspection of the school since it converted to academy status and joined the Valley Invicta Academies Trust in December 2013.
- Just over one quarter of pupils are disadvantaged pupils, just above the national average.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller pupils is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average.
- The school meets the current government floor targets.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about the use of pupil premium funding or special educational needs information.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 18 lessons, across all classes, four jointly with school leaders.
- Meetings were held with pupils, the headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the newly appointed executive headteacher and three trustees, including the chair of the local governing body. The lead inspector also met the chair of the VIAT board and the joint chief executive officer with responsibility for Aylesford Primary School.
- Questionnaire returns submitted online by 20 members of staff and 37 pupils were also taken into consideration.
- Inspectors looked at a range of pupils' work, listened to pupils read, observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around the school and at lunchtime and talked informally with staff and pupils.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents by talking to family members before and after school and taking into account the 39 responses on the online parent questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also considered the free text question responses submitted by parents.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including those to do with safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, minutes of meetings of the local governing body, the school's evaluation of its own performance and the school's performance plan.

Inspection team

Theresa Phillips, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lizzie Jeanes	Ofsted Inspector
Sean McKeown	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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