

Benenden Church of England Primary School

The Green, Benenden, Cranbrook, Kent TN17 4DN

Inspection dates

13–14 December 2016

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The determined and focused leadership of the headteacher, senior leaders and governors has secured ongoing improvement since the previous inspection. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' achievement are now good.
- One parent expressed the views of many with the comment, 'The school has worked hard over the last couple of years to move forward. In very difficult surroundings they make the most of everything they have and the children do not feel hard done by in any way. This is a testament to the school, the teaching and the leadership within the school.' Inspection evidence fully supports this view.
- Effective teaching ensures that all groups of pupils generally make good progress and attain well by the time they leave the school.
- By the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2, standards of attainment are above that found nationally. Reading is a strength in the school. Pupils read widely and develop as confident, fluent readers. Phonics skills are taught well.
- Achievement in mathematics lags a little behind that in reading and writing because pupils, particularly the most able, have not developed good enough skills in reasoning mathematically.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning and enjoy their time at school. They are friendly, caring and respectful to other pupils and adults.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils feel safe and happy and are well looked after.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school.
- Safeguarding is rightly given a high priority in the school.
- Governors know the school well. They hold leaders to account very effectively for pupils' achievement.
- Children get a good start to school in the Reception Year. They make good progress, develop confidence, independence and a love of learning.
- Teachers know the pupils well and provide work that mostly meets their needs. However, sometimes teachers do not use assessment information effectively enough. This means that pupils, particularly the most able, do not always make the best possible progress.
- The role of leaders in the foundation subjects is not yet developed sufficiently to have a strong enough impact on the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' achievement.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all pupils consistently make the rapid progress of which they are capable by:
 - making sure that teachers use assessment information more effectively
 - ensuring that work is more precisely matched to pupils' abilities and is sufficiently challenging, particularly for the most able pupils
 - enabling pupils, especially the most able pupils in key stage 2, to work at a greater depth in mathematics and further develop mathematical reasoning skills.
- Strengthen the role of subject leaders to ensure that they have a greater impact on the quality of teaching, learning and achievement in the foundation subjects and are held to account more effectively.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher, ably supported by the assistant headteacher, has been unwavering in her determination to secure the best possible learning experiences for pupils in the school. She has maintained a clear focus on pupils' learning and well-being even when faced with extremely difficult and significant challenges for the school community. Of note is the way in which leaders and all staff manage pupils' learning in the cramped conditions in the main building and across the five different buildings that the school has to use.
- The headteacher's ambition to ensure that all pupils thrive and achieve well is shared by staff and governors. As a result, teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils have improved since the previous inspection.
- The focus on improving teaching has raised standards across the school. Effective monitoring provides leaders with accurate information. If there are any weaknesses, appropriate support is provided and improvement is expected. Staff benefit from well-targeted training that meets whole-school priorities as well as individual needs very effectively. Staff develop their skills further through working with colleagues from other schools and working together in school to share good practice and learn from each other.
- Leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of what the school does well and what it needs to do to improve further. They make frequent, detailed checks on the quality of the school's performance to inform the plan for improvement.
- There is a rigorous process for assessing and tracking pupils' progress. This gives a clear view of how well pupils are achieving and enables leaders to identify any pupils who may be falling behind so that extra help can be given. This valuable information is not always used as effectively as it might be by all teachers to ensure that the next steps in learning are pitched at exactly the right level for pupils of all abilities, and in particular the most able pupils.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and pupils enjoy learning a range of subjects and make good progress. The curriculum is planned well around interesting topics and themes. Planning ensures that pupils in the mixed-aged classes cover all the appropriate aspects of the national curriculum.
- The curriculum is enriched through visits and visitors to school. Pupils thoroughly enjoyed and were captivated by visiting musicians who talked about and played their instruments. Themed weeks and days provide links across subjects that provide pupils with memorable and meaningful learning experiences. Pupils spoke with great enthusiasm about their study of Ancient Egypt, during which they developed writing, art and design skills as well as making good progress in their historical knowledge.
- A good range of clubs helps pupils to learn new skills as well as making a significant contribution to their personal as well as their academic development. One parent wrote, 'The staff are very dedicated and give up their time to put on a range of extra-curricular activities after school and also arrange lots of outings or special days connected to topic work which is an exciting way to learn and which my child thoroughly enjoys.'

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development underpins all that the school does and is a strength of the school. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain because all staff promote and demonstrate fundamental British values in all areas across the school.
- For example, respect and tolerance are fostered very effectively through the school's values and the subjects taught. Pupils have a strong sense of community and understand the need for rules within the school and the wider society. Pupils learn about and celebrate different religions and cultures. Equal opportunities are promoted well and pupils learn without fear of discrimination of any type. The school values of friendship, trust and forgiveness are upheld and promoted by pupils in their work and play.
- Leaders make good use of the primary physical education (PE) and sport funding. They work particularly hard to overcome the challenges of the restricted accommodation to ensure that pupils receive a range of PE and sports activities. The funding enables further links with a variety of other schools, sports specialists and sports clubs and there are increased opportunities for pupils to take part in competitive sports. Working with specialist sports coaches enhances the skills of pupils and teachers and therefore improves outcomes for pupils.
- The school has worked effectively to improve the progress of the small number of disadvantaged pupils. The additional funding is used well to provide a range of additional support as appropriate to the needs of the pupils. Senior leaders check very carefully any differences in achievement between disadvantaged pupils, including those who are the most able, and other pupils nationally. This ensures that action is taken to enable them to make similar progress to others.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and the education their children receive. They expressed every confidence in the leadership, particularly the headteacher. One parent wrote, 'The headteacher has had a very positive impact on the school, knows all the children by name and is very approachable.' Not surprisingly, several parents commented on the cramped conditions and lack of facilities and, like the staff, pupils and governors, look forward to the building of the new school.
- The local authority supports the school very effectively and has worked productively with leaders and staff since the previous inspection to ensure that improvements have been made.
- Senior leaders have correctly identified that the roles of leaders for the foundation subjects need strengthening. Leaders of these subjects know the strengths and priorities and have action plans for improvement. However, they are not yet fully accountable for the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress.

Governance of the school

- The governing body know the school well. Governors share the ambition and aspirations of the headteacher and work strategically to ensure the school's ongoing improvement.
- Governors provide a good balance of support and challenge to leaders. They are well informed by the headteacher and their own monitoring work to enable them to do this. Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and the key priorities for further development.

- Governors question the achievement of different groups of pupils and how well this compares to national figures. They check that additional funding is used effectively to determine that it is making a difference for pupils. They have a clear view of the quality of teaching and how the performance of staff is managed to reward effective practice.
- Regular skills audits are carried out to make sure that the governing body has an appropriate range of expertise.
- Governors ensure that all statutory responsibilities are met, including those relating to safeguarding.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. Training is up to date and any new requirements are immediately brought to the attention of all staff.
- Rigorous systems and procedures are in place. Record-keeping of any concerns or referrals to external agencies are well organised. Strong relationships with parents and external agencies ensure that pupils quickly get any help and support should they need it.
- The appropriate checks relating to the safe recruitment of staff are carried out and all visitors to the school are checked in and wear badges so that they can be identified by pupils.
- Leaders, staff and governors have established a clear culture of safeguarding in the school. All staff are aware of their responsibilities for keeping pupils safe. Staff are extremely vigilant about pupils' safety when they move from one site to another and risks are constantly assessed.
- As a result of the school's work, pupils said that they feel safe in school and all parents who responded to the online questionnaire agree that the school keeps their children safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching and learning have improved since the previous inspection and are now good. As a result, pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics have improved and are good.
- Relationships between pupils and their teachers are very good. Pupils want to do well and work hard. They have positive attitudes to learning and know that their opinions and efforts are valued.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work well together. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning, especially when they support individuals or small groups, especially those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Teachers provide lessons that capture the interests of pupils and motivate them. Pupils work well together to share ideas and opinions.
- Pupils in Year 5 and Year 6, for example, were engrossed in their writing based on the class novel 'There's a boy in the girls' bathroom'. A group agreed with one pupil who said, 'It's really, really good and we always want to know what is going to happen

next.' Pupils responded extremely well and with great maturity to this challenging text. They made good progress in writing instructional texts linked to a character in the novel. Their work prompted lots of discussion around issues of bullying, friendship and being different and therefore made a good contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

- The school's policy for marking and feedback is used consistently. Pupils say that teachers' comments help them know how to improve their work.
- Teachers generally plan challenging work that meets the needs of the different year groups and abilities. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive effective additional support when needed.
- Reading is taught well. Reading is promoted very effectively across the school. Reading at home is encouraged and helps pupils develop a love of reading. Phonics teaching is good. Younger pupils demonstrated, when reading to inspectors, good knowledge and use of phonics skills to help them read unfamiliar words. Older pupils demonstrated fluency and confidence when reading to inspectors. They talked about their favourite authors and styles of writing and gave considered and thoughtful reasons for their views.
- Teachers often provide pupils with good models of writing so that their expectations for pupils' work are clear and pupils know what makes a successful piece of writing. Pupils said that talking about writing with a friend and planning it out helps them 'gather and sort out our ideas'. Teachers provide pupils with opportunities to use their writing skills across a range of subjects and the quality of pupils' writing has improved.
- Teachers do extremely well to provide motivating, inspiring classrooms in the very cramped conditions. Displays are used well to support teaching and learning and there is a purposeful atmosphere within the school which promotes learning well. Pupils respond well to the positive 'can do' culture in the school and are not afraid to make mistakes. As one pupil said, 'It doesn't matter if we make a mistake, we can learn something new from it.'
- Occasionally teachers' use of assessment information is not as effective as it could be. This means that the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are not always sufficiently challenged. Sometimes a few pupils struggle because work is too hard for them.
- Improvements have been made in mathematics since the previous inspection. More time is spent on teaching the subject. There is an increased focus on mental mathematics and targeted additional support for individuals. These are all having a positive impact. Leaders have, however, rightly identified that there is a need to focus on ensuring that pupils' mathematical reasoning skills are developed, and that there are greater challenges for pupils to learn with a deeper level of understanding, particularly the most able pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.

- Pupils thrive in a happy, caring environment. They enjoy their time in school and participate with great enthusiasm in all that the school offers them. They are prepared well for the next stage of their education.
- Staff know all the pupils well and as a consequence, individual personal, social emotional and behavioural needs are supported very effectively.
- Pupils are confident, friendly and articulate. They care about their school, their teachers and each other. The school has a calm and harmonious atmosphere. Pupils cope extremely well with the restrictions in their classrooms and the playground and having to walk to other buildings for lunch and other activities. As a consequence, they develop a strong sense of personal safety and vigilance for the safety of each other.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They said that there is no bullying in school: 'We're not allowed to bully.' They are confident to turn to staff should any problems arise and know that they will be listened to. Pupils understand about different types of bullying, including online bullying, and spoke knowledgeably about this from their activities in a recent anti-bullying week. They know how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations in and out of school, including when using the internet.
- Pupils enjoy their responsibilities and take them seriously: for example, school council members, head boy and head girl, play monitors and buddies.
- Parents agree that their children are happy, safe and well looked after in school. One parent commented, 'My son has blossomed into a confident boy at this school.' Another wrote that her children have been 'nurtured, loved and taught to be the confident, achieving, happy children they are today.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are polite and well mannered. They are welcoming to visitors, holding doors open and enquiring if they could help inspectors find their way to classes.
- Behaviour is managed well by staff. Most pupils conduct themselves very sensibly in lessons, around the school and when walking between the various buildings. Pupils are very aware of the need to watch out for others in the small playground, which does not give them a lot of space. They generally show consideration and care, particularly for the younger pupils. Staff and pupils are particularly vigilant when pupils are able, weather permitting, to have their lunchtime play on the village green.
- Pupils learn self-discipline but occasionally a few need reminders from adults in order to behave well. Pupils agree that pupils behave well most of the time but said that on rare occasions in lessons a few do not behave as expected. They said teachers deal with this well and it does not stop them learning. Pupils are clear about teachers' expectations and the consequences of any behaviour that does not meet the school's expectations. All staff who responded to the online survey agreed that behaviour is well managed. School records show that incidents of inappropriate behaviour have reduced over the past year.
- Attendance is above the national average. Leaders follow up any absences and work well with families to ensure that most pupils attend regularly and few pupils are persistently absent. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved and the gap between their attendance and that of others has narrowed.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' achievement has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils' work in their books and the school's information about progress show that pupils, of all abilities, currently in the school achieve well. This is seen in a range of subjects, including art, music, history and geography as well as in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Some caution needs to be taken when interpreting achievement information due to the relatively small numbers in Year 6. In 2016, one pupil represented 5% of the group.
- For the past two years by the end of Year 2, pupils reached standards that were above those found nationally and were particularly strong in reading and writing. In 2016, the proportion working at a greater depth was considerably above the national figures.
- In 2015, by the end of Year 6, pupils reached above-average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. All pupils made the expected progress in mathematics and reading, and the proportion that made the expected progress in writing was in line with that found nationally. The proportion that made more than expected progress was above the national average in all three subjects.
- By the end of key stage 2 in 2016, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard or above in reading, writing and mathematics was above that found nationally. It was considerably stronger in reading than writing or mathematics.
- Published information shows that progress between the end of Year 2 and the end of Year 6 in 2016 was not significantly different from that found nationally, and weaker in mathematics than in reading and writing. Leaders took this very seriously and worked with unwavering determination to ensure that progress accelerated.
- The impact of this is seen in the progress made by pupils currently in the school. The school's information shows that in all year groups all pupils currently are making at least the expected progress and the large majority are making more than the expected progress.
- Regular and systematic teaching of phonics in the early years and key stage 1 has resulted in an above-average proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check over the last three years. The proportion increased further in 2016. Pupils use their phonics skills well to help them read and write.
- Pupils enjoy reading. As they progress they develop a range of strategies to help them read with confidence, understanding and expression. They use inference to develop good comprehension skills and empathise with characters. Their reading has a positive impact on their writing as they have a growing sense of what will keep a reader engaged and motivated.
- Pupils have increasing opportunities to write across a range of subjects and engage in drama and speaking activities to motivate and prompt their ideas for writing. There has been a focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar, which has helped to improve pupils' skills in these areas.
- The school's work to diminish the difference between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is effective. In 2016 in Year 2 and Year 6 there were too few disadvantaged pupils, including those who were most able, to comment in detail on their attainment. However, by Year 6 disadvantaged pupils

made more progress than other pupils nationally in reading. They made slower progress in mathematics.

- Disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are achieving increasingly well and often make rapid progress. This is due to the good support provided by teachers and teaching assistants to reduce barriers to learning with a range of successful strategies to make sure that they achieve as well as possible.
- There are currently very few pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and too few to comment in any detail on their achievement.
- The most able pupils currently in the school, including those who are disadvantaged, are generally challenged to achieve well, particularly in reading and writing. Leaders have correctly identified that challenges could be greater and expectations higher, particularly in mathematics, to ensure that this group consistently make the more rapid progress of which they are capable.

Early years provision

Good

- Children start in the early years with skills and knowledge that are generally typical for their age.
- They make good progress in the Reception Year and are well prepared to continue their learning in Year 1.
- Over the past three years, the proportion of children that reached a good level of development has been above that found nationally. It was considerably above the national average in 2016.
- There are good procedures to get to know children and their families before they start at school. Continuing good relationships with parents ensure that they can work in partnership with the school to support their children's learning.
- The quality of teaching and learning are good. There is a successful focus on children's early reading and writing skills as well as interesting activities across all areas of learning. Assessment is used well to plan the next steps for learning. A record of children's achievements is made in the 'My Unique Story' books.
- Activities are planned that capture the interest and imagination of the children so that they quickly develop a love of learning.
- Children have many opportunities to use writing as a means of communication and so develop good early writing skills. For example, when children make and build models with various construction materials, they automatically write a label explaining what it is.
- Children were very keen to share their knowledge of numbers by accurately counting up to 20 the number of baubles on their drawings of Christmas trees. One child was jumping with excitement because she could read all the words in the baubles on her tree.
- Children's independence is promoted well and children develop confidence and enquiring minds as a result. They behave well, sharing and cooperating well with each other at work and play in the classroom and the outdoor area.

- The curriculum promotes effective learning in the classroom and outdoors. In the outside area, a group of boys were completely engrossed in rolling different balls down along a series of tilted pipes. They offered to explain which balls would roll more quickly: 'The plastic ones with holes in, because the air makes it go faster.' Not only were they learning well but they also demonstrated good cooperation, sharing and consideration for each other.
- Staff ensure that all the safeguarding and welfare requirements appropriate to this age group are met. They ensure that children are kept safe and that they learn how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Children knew, for example, that they must wash their hands before eating their fruit. All the necessary actions are taken to support any children whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and to reduce any barriers to learning.
- Parents are very positive about their children's start in school. One wrote, 'My child has settled so well into Reception. She has made lots of friends, amazing progress in reading and maths and is so happy she literally skips into and out of school.' Another commented, 'My daughter started Reception this year and is thriving, loves her teachers, loves the learning and is always in good spirits.'
- Good leadership of the early years ensures that the school has an accurate view of the effectiveness of the early years provision.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 118597 |
| Local authority | Kent |
| Inspection number | 10019883 |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary controlled |
| Age range of pupils | 5 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 159 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Martin Goodwin |
| Headteacher | Gill Knox |
| Telephone number | 01580 240565 |
| Website | www.benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk |
| Email address | headteacher@benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 20–21 November 2014 |

Information about this school

- Benenden is smaller than the average-sized primary school. Pupils are taught in six classes. In the Reception Year, Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3, pupils are taught in single age classes. There are two mixed-age classes, one for Year 4 and Year 5 and one for Year 5 and Year 6.
- Children attend full time in the Reception Year.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium funding is well below average.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

- The school met the 2015 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 long-standing accommodation problems continue. The school works across five sites based around the village green. The main school building houses the key stage 1 and key stage 2 classes. There is a separate early years building where all pupils have their hot school lunches. The village hall, the memorial hall and the church are also used. There is no hall in the main school building. It is anticipated that a new school will be built for occupation in January 2018.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in all classes. Many observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their work and looked at the work in their books.
- Inspectors observed pupils at playtime and lunchtime and asked them for their views on the school. They also talked to pupils about reading and listened to some pupils read.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, assistant headteacher, governors, the local authority and other staff with key leadership responsibilities.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, including: the school's own check on its performance and the quality of teaching; the school improvement plan; information on pupils' progress; and records relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.
- Inspectors looked at the 57 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, which included 31 written comments. They also spoke with some parents at the start of the day and received one letter from a parent. In addition, they took account of 13 questionnaires returned by staff.

Inspection team

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Margaret Coussins, lead inspector | Ofsted Inspector |
| Lynda Welham | 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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