

Palace Wood Primary School

Ash Grove, Allington, Maidstone, Kent ME16 0AB

Inspection dates

4–5 July 2017

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 determination and drive of senior leaders have brought about significant improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and to pupils' outcomes.
- Governors provide clear, strategic direction for the school. They provide both good support to the headteacher and helpful challenge.
- Leaders check pupils' learning and progress regularly and effectively. They ensure that actions are taken quickly to support pupils who are at risk of falling behind.
- Pupils enjoy their learning because teachers plan activities that are engaging. Pupils make strong progress from their different starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils also make good progress in subjects beyond English and mathematics.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged make good progress. Leaders ensure that these pupils are well supported in lessons.
- Lessons capture pupils' interest and develop their knowledge and understanding. As a result, pupils learn well and make good progress. There are positive relationships between pupils and adults and this helps lessons to proceed smoothly.
- Pupils behave well and work hard. Pupils know the importance of good manners and are keen to put the school's values into practice. Pupils feel safe at school.
- Children are safe, settled and happy in the early years. As a result of consistently good teaching, children make strong progress from the time they start and are well prepared for their learning in Year 1.
- Parents are very supportive of the school. One parent captured the opinions of many and reported: 'The school is fantastic... the children run in to school happy and with enthusiasm every day.'
- Lessons are well planned and teachers set tasks that focus well on most pupils' needs. However, at times teachers do not challenge pupils well enough, especially the most able pupils.
- All teachers follow agreed practices for teaching and learning, mostly to good effect. However, some teachers are less skilled at monitoring how well pupils learn during lessons. This leads to steady, rather than rapid, progress for some pupils.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - teachers consistently check pupils' understanding during lessons and use this to shape learning effectively
 - pupils are set consistently challenging tasks to extend their learning and progress, especially the most able pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher is resolute in his determination to raise standards. He has worked successfully with governors, staff and the local authority to improve all aspects of the school's work. He has a clear vision and is aware of the priorities for the future. Leaders have systematically eradicated previous weaknesses in teaching and learning by well-considered and effective actions. This is why the quality of education has improved and there is a highly ambitious culture for pupils set by staff. As one parent said of the school, 'It is going from strength to strength.'
- Senior leaders have an accurate view of what the school does well because of ongoing, detailed evaluation of the school's performance. Leaders have clear priorities for areas that require further improvement and are relentless in their pursuit of excellence, communicating a sense of drive and urgency to continue to move forward.
- Leaders make sure that the curriculum focuses pupils' social and academic development in a broad and balanced range of subjects. Leaders regularly evaluate how well the curriculum meets pupils' needs. As a result, leaders carefully plan how the curriculum is designed to inspire pupils. One parent spoke of her child's experience, saying: 'My son loves the school and his teachers, he loves the exciting learning activities and makes fantastic progress year after year.' The curriculum is enhanced by a wide variety of enrichment activities. Pupils speak positively about the different clubs offered to them.
- Leaders make sure that pupils' physical health is given high priority. They have used the primary physical education and sport funding well to enhance the curriculum further. Pupils are involved in sports and physical activities throughout and beyond the school day, including at lunchtimes, for example in netball. Sports coaches work with pupils effectively to raise the profile of exercise and to inspire pupils to improve their skills. At the same time, this is improving teachers' skills in teaching specific areas of the physical education curriculum.
- Leaders provide regular and effective training for teachers, which is closely linked to their performance management targets. They monitor teachers' performance rigorously, using the teachers' standards as well as the school's priorities for improving pupils' progress and attainment.
- Arrangements for checking on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are robust, accurate and effective. The headteacher, alongside other leaders, visits lessons and evaluates work in books to check thoroughly that previous weaknesses have been improved. They also analyse progress data accurately to fully confirm findings. They know the strengths and weaknesses of teaching in their areas of responsibility and have a firm grasp of what is needed to bring about further improvement.
- Leaders receive regular support from the local authority. A learning improvement officer visits the school and holds challenge meetings. Leaders welcome the robust accountability the local authority provides, and readily act on subsequent advice and guidance. This support has successfully contributed to the improvements at the school since the last inspection.
- Leaders use additional funding, received from the government for specific purposes,

well. Pupil premium funding is used well to diminish differences in disadvantaged pupils' attainment in English and mathematics with that of other pupils nationally. This is confirmed by work in pupils' books, where there are notable examples of good and sometimes exceptionally rapid progress.

- Leaders allocate funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities wisely. The additional support, both for academic and personal development, put in place for them is having a positive impact on their progress and life skills.
- Links with parents are positive. Many parents appreciate that the school has improved over the last two years. Nearly all parents who completed the online questionnaire would recommend the school to another parent and considered that their child was happy in the school. Some pupils do not live in the local area. One parent living some distance from the school told an inspector, 'It is well worth the journey across town.'
- Everyone is treated equally and there is no discrimination. Opportunities are used throughout the day to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. For example, pupils are strongly encouraged, and respond very positively, to opportunities to reflect on their school work as well as the consequences of their actions if they do not fully uphold the school's values. Consequently, pupils also have a strong foundation on which they have developed a sound understanding of British values, including showing respect to other pupils and staff alike.
- Leaders have ensured that the school is now an extremely positive place for pupils to learn and play. All staff work hard to embed the school's ethos and know the importance of preparing pupils well for the future. The school's values are very well understood and adhered to by the pupils. Displays in corridors and in classrooms provide effective examples of how pupils demonstrate these values each day.

Governance of the school

- Governors are very well led by the chair and vice-chair of governors. They provide valuable insights to support the new governors appointed since the previous inspection. Good use is made of individual governors' skills and experience. An audit of governors' skills has been completed, resulting in targeted training such as induction for those new to governance.
- Governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and the aspects that could be better. The governing body supports school leaders very effectively and shares the school's vision and ambition for their pupils' futures.
- Governors have worked hard to get to know the school. They are able to check for themselves the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and development. Governors undertake frequent visits to the school based closely on the school's improvement priorities and have used these well to provide necessary support and also effective challenge. They are rigorous in their examination of the school's performance information and regularly ask questions regarding the progress of different groups of pupils in different classes. As a result, the governing body has contributed to the improvements in teaching and outcomes since the last inspection.
- Governors fulfil their role in managing performance well. An effective system of performance management is in place and there are strong links between the school's

priorities and performance-related pay, with a clear focus on pupils' achievement.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of care at the school. Staff stay vigilant to ensure that pupils remain safe.
- All staff are trained regularly in necessary aspects of safeguarding. The school knows its pupils very well and detailed records are kept about all safeguarding issues. Checks on adults who work with pupils are carried out and recorded appropriately.
- The school works well with parents and a range of outside agencies, including the local authority and health organisations. This ensures that pupils are supported effectively and kept safe.
- Staff have a very good awareness of the signs and symptoms of abuse and the child protection procedures to be followed in the event of an incident. They know that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
- The school's ethos promotes all aspects of safeguarding very well. Visitors, for example, are provided with key information related to keeping pupils safe. Information in staff areas ensures that all adults who work in the school are clear about the procedures to follow should they have concerns about a pupil's welfare.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The effective programme of support for teachers has increased their confidence in planning appropriate work according to pupils' ages and aptitudes. As a result, standards have risen and continue to improve.
- Classrooms are well organised with displays and prompts to support pupils' learning, particularly in spelling and vocabulary. For example, learning walls promote writing skills well. Pupils write well-structured and adventurous pieces of work.
- Work in books shows that pupils have developed a good deal of resilience and independence, knowing strategies they can use before asking for help. As a result, they are able to concentrate for substantial periods of time and use appropriate resources to find and work things out for themselves.
- Teachers usually use effective questions that encourage pupils to discuss and think about their work. Pupils answer questions enthusiastically and confidently and learn well from the answers that other pupils give. For example, in a mathematics lesson in Year 5, when learning about using fractions, the teacher asked additional questions that developed and widened knowledge beyond the scope of the initial question.
- Teachers learn from one another. They assess work together, carefully identifying appropriate next steps for pupils in their learning. This means that learning opportunities usually address gaps in understanding. However, at times teachers do not challenge pupils in the tasks they provide, especially the most able pupils. This means that they do not make the rapid progress they could.
- Skilled teaching assistants are well deployed and contribute strongly to pupils' effective

learning. They often work with individual pupils and take care to develop their confidence and independence.

- Teachers are now skilled in the teaching of writing. As a result, pupils now write with precision and technical understanding. Work in books shows that they are able to maintain this in a wide range of styles and with increasingly sophisticated punctuation.
- The teaching of phonics is consistently effective. Staff have a secure understanding of the knowledge pupils need and are skilled in delivering lively, interesting lessons. As a result, pupils quickly learn how to use their phonics skills to help with their attempts at reading and spelling unknown words. For example, one pupil reading to an inspector correctly used their phonics knowledge to say the unfamiliar word, 'lavish'.
- Teachers provide many opportunities to develop pupils' mathematical skills in a range of real-life contexts, including in other subjects. Pupils are particularly good at using their knowledge of numbers in other aspects of mathematics. The school's drive to improve pupils' problem-solving skills is working well. Inspectors saw a range of examples where pupils worked together effectively to solve problems and justify their answers.
- Teachers do not consistently judge how well pupils are doing during lessons. They do not adapt lessons as they develop to meet pupils' needs. Sometimes, pupils can spend too long on tasks which they have already understood, or start with work that does not challenge them sufficiently. When this happens, it slows pupils' progress.
- Parents have recognised both the improvements in teaching and the leaders' impact on teaching. One parent said: 'We now have a dynamic leadership team whose positivity and support flows through to the teaching staff. If you need to see someone a teacher is always there to ask.'

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are well-prepared for the move to secondary school. They take responsibility for their own actions, and are respectful and tolerant of the rights and needs of others. Pupils thrive in the caring, positive environment of the school to become confident young people who understand how they learn.
- Pupils are safe and say that they feel safe. They have regular opportunities in lessons and in assemblies to learn about how to keep themselves safe in different situations, including road safety and using the internet safely.
- Pupils say that bullying is very rare. They understand why bullying is wrong and have confidence in their teachers and leaders to sort out problems quickly. Pupils say that there is an adult they can share their concerns with. They talk of, and appreciate, the kindness all staff show in keeping them well cared for.
- Pupils develop an effective and age-appropriate understanding of equalities. They talk confidently about why they should treat others with respect and kindness. Pupils are keen to talk about their own traditions and backgrounds and listen attentively when

their friends do the same.

- Pupils learn from a young age to share and take turns through the range of activities provided indoors and outdoors. This, and their positive attitudes to learning, makes a strong contribution to the good progress they make and an atmosphere where pupils focus on learning and develop into responsible members of the school community.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. Pupils help and encourage one another as they work in classrooms and play outside during breaks and lunchtimes. Occasionally, in some lessons, pupils drift off-task when they are not sufficiently challenged.
- In lessons, pupils behave well and are self-disciplined when tackling their work. They listen carefully to their teachers and want to learn. Pupils follow instructions quickly and there are very few interruptions to learning during lessons. A sense of calm permeates the school, including in the playground. Routines are well established and pupils know what is expected of them.
- Staff successfully promote good behaviour to pupils. Positive behaviour is rewarded and pupils are motivated to behave. They are aware of the consequences of poor behaviour. Behaviour is consistently well managed and staff feel well supported by leaders, as indicated in the staff survey.
- Pupils are polite and well mannered, typically acting out the school's values. One parent said, 'The values are strong throughout and the children believe strongly in following them.' Pupils are respectful of each other and adults, including visitors, whom they greet warmly. They move sensibly and calmly around the school, wearing their uniforms with pride and trying very hard to keep their work and school neat and tidy.
- Pupils' attendance has improved as a result of leaders' ongoing efforts to work with parents. Absence rates are similar to national figures for all other primary schools. Families who struggle to get their children to school regularly are exceptionally well supported to find solutions to their difficulties. Despite this, some pupils' absence remains too high.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils in the school have made good progress in both English and mathematics this year. The vast majority of pupils are working at an age-appropriate standard and have largely overcome a legacy of underachievement from previous years. This is notable for older pupils.
- Leaders have put in place a robust system for tracking pupils' progress from their starting points. They regularly identify the strengths, weaknesses and next steps to improve outcomes for all pupils. The school's assessment information and the work in pupils' books show that the standards pupils reach are rising quickly.
- Teachers are quick to identify any pupils who are at risk of falling behind. Teachers then make effective provision for them, either within the class, in small groups, or individually. This helps pupils to achieve well and become more secure in their

knowledge of how to be a successful learner.

- Disadvantaged pupils' progress is now good. They make progress across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics, which is broadly in line with other pupils nationally from different starting points.
- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make good progress. The proportion of pupils on track to achieve greater depth by the end of the year has risen. For current pupils it is above last year's national average in combined reading, writing and mathematics. Despite this, there are times when teachers and teaching assistants do not challenge this group of pupils well enough to make the rapid progress they are capable of. This is because they are not consistently encouraged to work at a level of challenge to achieve at greater depth. On occasion, they are not asked questions that make them think hard enough or join different aspects of learning together.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has developed a comprehensive system for the early identification of pupils who may need extra help. This group of pupils now make strong progress. Outcomes for these pupils show notable improvement since the school introduced its rigorous tracking system. The emotional support also helps build pupils' confidence and improve their study skills.
- Teaching of phonics is effective. Staff have benefited from training that has developed their skills to teach early reading skills more precisely. The proportion of pupils who achieve the expected standards in the Year 1 phonics screening check has increased sharply over the last three years.
- Pupils make strong gains in mathematics. Teachers ensure that pupils develop strong calculation strategies and use these in a range of contexts. Pupils' problem-solving skills are also good, and many pupils are developing the ability to check their work and test out their thinking.

Early years provision

Good

- The leadership of the early years provision has high expectations of children's learning and behaviour. Early years leaders are clearly a part of the wider school's leadership structure and are held accountable by the headteacher. They have a well-thought-out strategic plan, and accurately monitor and evaluate achievement robustly, being as it is at the heart of the leader's ambition for the children.
- Provision in the early years is good as a result of the effective actions taken by leaders. For example, they have invested time in staff training and to restructure the way writing is taught. Children make at least good progress from starting points that are below those typical for their age, including those who are disadvantaged and the most able.
- Teachers design activities that are well suited to the individual cohorts of children and focus strongly on the boys' current needs and interests. This is working well. Boys in the early years are making progress that is equally as good as that of girls.
- Relationships between adults and children are very strong. Adults show genuine pleasure at children's company. The calm approach taken by staff puts children at ease and enables them to flourish in a safe, secure atmosphere. As a result, children like

coming to school and become happy, confident learners.

- Additional funding to support children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used effectively. Staff make sure that all activities led by adults are well planned, interesting and challenging. As a result, children become inquisitive learners who can sustain concentration, listen to one another and make rapid progress.
- Pupils who are disadvantaged achieve well. The school's assessment information shows that these pupils make rapid progress, and any differences between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and that of others are diminishing. These pupils have benefited extremely well from the very effective teaching in phonics.
- Children quickly learn the essential social and emotional skills. They are able to share, take turns and apply themselves to tasks well. In class, they show good levels of maturity and can concentrate for relatively long periods of time.
- Teachers plan a rich variety of interesting learning activities, both indoors and outdoors, to develop children's skills in all areas of learning, and to promote the rapid acquisition of reading, writing and number skills.
- Partnerships with parents are strong. Parents value the good communication between school and home and the opportunities to share in their children's learning. The 'phonics café' enables parents to understand how the school teaches early reading skills and helps parents to support their child's learning at home. As a result, there is an effective, shared approach to the children's development.

School details

Unique reference number	135106
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10024518

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	414
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Perks
Headteacher	Mark Chatley
Telephone number	01622 750 084
Website	www.palacewoodprimary.org.uk/
Email address	office@palacewood.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–12 February 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school met the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6, in 2016.
- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher and SENCo have started in their roles. There are new members of the governing body.
- The school is of an above-average size for a primary school.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported through pupil premium funding is below the national average, as is the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- A small proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors made visits to all classrooms. The headteacher and other school leaders accompanied inspectors on some of these visits.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, representatives from the governing body, middle leaders and teachers. A representative from the local authority also met with inspectors.
- A wide range of documentation was scrutinised by inspectors. Information related to safeguarding, pupils' achievement and leaders' monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment was considered.
- Inspectors looked at work in pupils' books during visits to lessons and in a specific work scrutiny session.
- Inspectors heard pupils in Year 2 and Year 3 reading. An inspector met formally with a group of pupils. Inspectors observed playtimes and lunchtimes and spoke with pupils informally in lessons and outside.
- Inspectors met with parents in the playground. Inspectors took into account the 118 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey.

Inspection team

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Stephanie Scutter	Ofsted Inspector

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