

Northdown Primary School

Tenterden Way, Margate, Kent CT9 3RE

Inspection dates

9–10 November 2017

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
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' progress and attainment vary too much from year to year and class to class.
- Too many pupils are not correctly identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. They do not receive the specialist help that would enable them to succeed.
- Disadvantaged pupils lag behind their classmates in all aspects of the curriculum and at all key stages.
- Recent changes to leadership have halted the school's decline. However, it is too soon to judge the impact of these changes on its overall performance.
- The quality of teaching in key stages 1 and 2 is too variable.
- In many lessons, pupils' behaviour is weak. They are easily distracted. They lack independence and lose concentration quickly when teachers are not guiding them directly.
- Many parents lack confidence in the school. Leaders' responses to their concerns have sometimes not been good enough.
- The staff are too often confused by what is expected of them. Until recently, their morale was low. This meant that they did not perform as well as they could.
- The Kemnal Academies Trust (TKAT), the school's sponsor, has only recently acted decisively to resolve the school's problems. Shortcomings in the arrangements for governance meant that TKAT's staff were not fully aware of all the issues facing the school.

The school has the following strengths

- Published outcomes for progress in writing are good.
- Children make good progress in the early years, and the large majority are ready for school in Year 1.
- There is some increasingly strong practice across the school. Staff have good models on which to base their work.
- The new leadership team is experienced and knows what is required to improve the school.
- Adults' care for pupils is good. Leaders work with a wide range of agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families receive focused support.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils by:
 - ensuring that all such pupils are enabled to make rates of progress similar to those of their classmates
 - enabling disadvantaged pupils to catch up with other pupils nationally, especially in reading and mathematics
 - extending the range of strategies for reducing the absence and persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils.
- Raise levels of progress and attainment for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities by:
 - continuing the urgent work already under way to better identify those who have barriers to learning
 - continuing to improve the provision for pupils who need to catch up with their peers or to make more rapid progress from their starting points.
- Strengthen the arrangements for governance by:
 - arranging elections for the vacant staff governor positions
 - developing the links between the joint Thanet governing board and the central TKAT board
 - developing a fit-for-purpose performance management system.
- Build purposeful and productive relationships with the parents by:
 - arranging elections immediately for the vacant parent governor positions
 - extending the good practice that exists in the early years
 - communicating openly, where possible, any necessary changes to staffing
 - responding clearly and in a timely manner to any well-founded concerns expressed by parents.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The current leadership arrangements have only been in place fully since May 2017. Thus, leaders have not yet had sufficient time to resolve the many issues faced by the school.
- Leaders are aware of the school's current weaknesses. They rightly judge the school to require improvement but have not written this up into either a meaningful evaluation document or a robust improvement plan.
- The headteacher is currently focused on improving the quality of teaching, pupils' behaviour and attendance. Each of these is a significant piece of work and so there is little time for systematic and structured writing up of reports. While this is understandable, one of the challenges facing the school is the legacy of weak and inaccurate recording.
- Some parents are justifiably concerned about the progress that their children are making, standards in the school and aspects of some pupils' behaviour. A minority of parents does not feel that leaders communicate with them well enough, especially about changes to class teachers.
- The provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is the most striking example of historic, ineffective management and administration. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is now working quickly with the new director of learning to rectify this situation. Since May 2017, they have identified three times the number of pupils who have a specific need. The majority of these are difficulties with cognition and learning.
- Similarly, the school's use of the pupil premium was not accounted for well until the headteacher joined the school in May 2017. She has identified the barriers faced by disadvantaged pupils and is now realigning the school's work to better meet their needs. In due course, the director of learning will publish these revised plans on the school's website.
- Subject leaders, like the vast majority of staff, suffered from a lack of direction and low morale until recently. They were not clear how they should undertake their roles. Senior leaders are now ensuring that they have access to good-quality training. They are beginning to share their work more widely with other subject leaders within the TKAT multi-academy trust.
- None of the staff currently has meaningful performance targets. They cannot, therefore, claim pay progression in a coherent manner. Conversely, leaders cannot hold them to account for their performance. All staff, however, told inspectors that their working conditions have improved dramatically in recent months.
- Leaders ensure that pupils have access to a good-quality curriculum. Inspectors observed learning in literacy and mathematics sessions and saw teachers supporting pupils' core skills. They also observed pupils' learning, or found evidence of it, in science, physical education, history, religious education, geography, music and design and technology. Inspectors observed some high-quality learning in art.

- Leaders are committed to preparing pupils for life in modern Britain. Pupils receive clear messages about the rule of law. The school makes a positive contribution to their spiritual development by a strong programme of assemblies. The praise assembly on Friday afternoons gives many pupils an opportunity to have their successes celebrated by their classmates and teachers. This also gives some time for reflection, which most pupils observe well.

Governance of the school

- In May 2017, a new chair of the governing body was appointed by TKAT to stabilise the governance arrangements. The governing body is expected to oversee the work of the five TKAT schools in the Thanet area. This arrangement is efficient, but there is no evidence yet that it will prove to be effective in supporting the necessary improvements at Northdown Primary school.
- Currently, there are vacancies for two parent governors and a staff governor. The chair of the governing body rightly believes that the staff would be better represented by a teacher governor and a governor from within the support teams.
- Governors are beginning to deal with the significant quantity of work that is required to ensure that Northdown returns to being a good school quickly. For example, governors are not:
 - routinely checking that the primary physical education and sports funding is used wisely
 - providing a coherent whistleblowing policy for staff as strongly recommended by the Department for Education
 - overseeing a rigorous performance management process
 - holding leaders to account fully for the school's results
 - checking for accuracy regularly enough in the information about the school on its website.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. However, there are some aspects of this work that need to be strengthened.
- Recent changes to the leadership of safeguarding have not been communicated clearly to parents. The wrong term for this person's role is used in documents on the website. The name of this person, on relevant policies, reflects a previous post-holder. Parents, therefore, are not sure to whom they would report safeguarding concerns.
- The site is secure and it is difficult for anyone to enter without being checked. Leaders tour the site each morning to make sure that only staff and pupils are on site. It is less difficult for pupils to leave the premises without permission.
- Leaders ensure that staff are trained appropriately for their role in safeguarding. The pupil services manager urges leaders constantly to provide up-to-date training on issues such as the 'Prevent' duty, signs of abuse and neglect and paediatric first aid. In combination with the newly appointed designated safeguarding leader, she has formed

productive relationships with a wide range of external services. Pupils in need of additional safeguarding support are managed well.

- Teachers are fully aware of their responsibilities with regard to safeguarding. They care for the pupils in their classes and most know the families well. The majority of parents like the ease of access to their child's teacher at the beginning and end of each day.
- A few parents commented that they would like leaders to have a more visible presence. This would give them greater confidence in the security of the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching varies from year to year and within classes. This is largely due to confusion among teachers about what is expected of them. It also reflects the legacy of instability on the staff and changes to leadership.
- Leaders are adamant that the teaching of writing is a strength of the school. Published outcomes for Year 6 in 2017 reflect this. However, inspectors did not find similar standards present among the current Year 6 pupils. Many pupils, in all year groups, are working below the relevant age expectation in writing.
- Teachers are not consistently challenging pupils to take care with their presentation. They are not consistently challenging pupils to use accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar. Work in literacy is often based on a set of comprehension questions and thus affords few opportunities for pupils to extend their writing or practise their skills.
- Similarly, in mathematics, many pupils are confused by over-complicated lesson instructions and activities. They could not explain to inspectors what they were supposed to be doing. Most set out number work accurately, but few had evidence of tasks to develop their mathematical reasoning.
- A minority of teachers focus their work specifically on pupils who have specific learning needs. Consequently, some pupils, in other classes, quickly lose interest and start to misbehave.
- Poor arrangements for identifying individual barriers to learning, for disadvantaged pupils, mean that many of them receive little direct support. As a result, too few make strong progress.
- The teaching of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities was hampered in the past by ineffective provision. Their progress was slowed because teachers did not have the resources they needed to support such pupils' learning. Leaders are dealing with this legacy issue with admirable urgency.
- Outside the core subjects, teaching reflects individual teachers' particular interests. These teachers are increasingly using their own good subject knowledge and imagination to provide exciting and stimulating learning experiences. In one session, pupils, in costume, learned the story of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments. In another, good-quality visual material was used to help pupils understand how the great fire of London spread quickly.
- The leadership of learning is improving due to some good recent appointments. There is increasing strength in key stage 1. This was necessary because the good start made

in the early years in, for example, the teaching of phonics, was not followed through in Years 1 and 2. Phonics teaching is now systematic and delivered well by all the adults working in the early years and key stage 1.

- The teaching of reading overall is improving. Leaders recognise that this key skill is essential for enabling pupils to access the rest of the curriculum. For example, the support for pupils who speak English as an additional language is as patchy and variable as for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement. Too many pupils lack confidence and self-esteem.
- Pupils generally do not take care with the presentation of their work. They do not take pride in what they are doing, and few make much effort to improve their work or respond positively to teachers' feedback.
- Leaders are acutely aware of the social and emotional challenges facing many pupils. They are increasingly trying to find ways to build pupils' resilience and well-being. They are also engaging with a full range of external agencies to support pupils and their families. This is so that even more pupils benefit from their time in school.
- Pupils said that they feel safe and like coming to school to meet their friends.
- Staff care for the pupils well and rejoice in the small successes that pupils experience. Each week, they identify pupils who have achieved something special or done something helpful or kind. Pupils thrive on the praise they receive as tokens of these moments. Gradually, the atmosphere in school is becoming positive and celebratory.
- Many parents commended their child's teacher for the care and concern they show. There is a small minority of parents who have well-founded concerns about their children's welfare. They do not feel that these concerns have been listened to carefully in the past.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Staff are at an early stage of working with a new behaviour policy. They are pleased to have been involved in its development since they found the last one unworkable. It had no impact on the behaviour of pupils.
- Even though some pupils are very young, from time to time, they behave in ways that are a danger to themselves or others. As a result, the school chooses to exclude them. This further restricts their opportunities for learning.
- Attendance is improving with the use of a range of strategies. Published information about the rates of attendance and persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils, however, shows that, on average, this group of pupils does not get to school regularly

enough.

- The conduct of pupils around the school at play and lunchtimes is generally good. Staff supervise the playgrounds and lunch hall intensely. When supervision or direct teacher attention is less intense, pupils' behaviour deteriorates. Pupils lack self-discipline. This is because they have not naturally developed good behaviours over time.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The performance of pupils in all year groups and all key stages is variable. It is too dependent on the individual class teacher and the length of time they have been working with the class.
- Some of the school's published results are impressive, such as the high average rate of progress made in writing by pupils in Year 6 in 2017. This was well above the national average. Conversely, the same pupils made less progress in reading and mathematics than pupils in other schools nationally.
- Similarly, the proportion of Year 6 pupils who achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in 2016 was above the national average. Pupils also made above-average progress in each of the subjects. In 2017, however, the next group of Year 6 pupils attained combined results that were 17 percentage points below the national average.
- In key stage 1, the performance of Northdown pupils has been consistently below national averages for the last two years. For example, outcomes in the phonics check in Year 1 are below average. The proportion of pupils who attain this benchmark by the end of Year 2 is also below average.
- In every measure, over time, too few pupils go on to work at greater depth in writing or to attain high standardised scores in reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. This includes those who are deemed to have done well in the early years and at the end of key stage 1.
- Even when overall performance exceeds national expectations, the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils lags behind that of their classmates. This means that they are not doing as well as other pupils nationally.
- The progress and attainment of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is very hard to measure. This is because they are not all correctly identified. Some pupils who have specific learning difficulties are still in the process of being assessed even though they have been in the school for some time.
- When pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are identified accurately, they benefit from good-quality provision. For example, a small group of pupils who have significant difficulties spend some of their time working on basic skills away from their mainstream class. In this tightly focused unit, pupils thrive and make small steps of progress in each session.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years unit is a strength of the school. Children join either in the Nursery or in Reception at levels below those typical for their age.
- The early years is well led. Leaders know the children and their relative strengths and weaknesses. Leaders form an accurate picture of what each child can do at the beginning of the Reception year and then build learning opportunities to extend them.
- Children in the early years benefit from a bright and well-established learning environment. There is a wealth of learning resources both inside and in the outside learning space. All members of the inspection team found children engaged in carefully designed learning-through-play opportunities.
- Adults exhibit features of strong practice. They are able to share their ideas with each other so that less experienced members of staff have good models to work from.
- The impact of this strong practice is clear in the happy and enthusiastic ways in which children engage in learning. Pupils are safe and cared for well. There are no breaches of the statutory welfare requirements.
- Pupils' behaviour in the early years is better than in the rest of the school. They take turns, share toys and other resources, and quickly learn to sit still and concentrate on what they are doing. Adults rarely have to remind them to behave properly.
- The children are polite and courteous towards each other and all adults.
- The quality of parental engagement is much better in Reception than in the rest of the school. Adults communicate more effectively with parents. Notably, parents contribute to each child's early years profile by supplying information on how the child is growing and developing at home. Learning is supported by well-crafted home learning tasks. Leaders also work closely with pre-schools and nurseries to get an accurate picture of children's abilities on entry to the setting.
- Adults extend this good communication practice into their work with the children directly. Adults talk continually to children about what they are doing. They ask questions which test children's growing knowledge and probe their understanding. Inspectors observed some high-quality interactions.
- Phonics is taught well at this stage so that children are ready for this aspect of learning in Year 1. This good practice is helping to build necessary literacy skills among the Nursery and Reception children.
- The early years leader ensures that the assessment of children's development is robust and accurate. All adults contribute evidence drawn from observations of children playing and learning. These are gathered into helpful documents which show the successful journeys that children have made through the early years. From low starting points, the majority of children are now attaining a good level of development at the end of Reception.
- As with the rest of the school, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are behind their peers. However, in the early years, they are identified more quickly and leaders arrange for much more tailored support and intervention to help them catch up. This is especially true for those who have communication, language and literacy difficulties.
- There is some practice in this setting that could easily be shared more widely. Notably,

it could be shared with teachers in the other key stages.

School details

Unique reference number	138434
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10033418

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	379
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Roger Silk
Headteacher	Sheila Todd
Telephone number	01843 226077
Website	www.northdown-tkat.org
Email address	sheila.todd@tkat.org
Date of previous inspection	12–13 June 2014

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication, on its website, of information about the progress and attainment of pupils; the current designated safeguarding leader; how the school ensures that disabled pupils have access to all areas of the premises and the curriculum; and the contact details of the chair of the governing body.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish on their websites about specific arrangements for excluding pupils.
- Northdown Primary is a larger-than-average school. It is currently part of the TKAT multi-academy trust. It is one of five schools organised as a cluster on the Isle of Thanet.
- The chair of the governing body is also the chair of the joint governance board, which

oversees all five TKAT, Thanet schools.

- There are slightly more girls than boys at the school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is double the national average.
- The number of pupils who are from Black and minority ethnic households is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average.
- Publicly held information about the proportion of pupils who receive support for their SEN and/or disabilities is not accurate. Leaders are currently working to identify precisely how many pupils have SEN and/or disabilities. This includes those who have an education, health and care plan or a statement of SEN and/or disabilities. This group is currently smaller, for the size of the school, than is found nationally.
- The number of pupils who either leave or join the school at times other than the end of a key stage is above the national average.
- The school is located in a region of above-average deprivation.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards.

Information about this inspection

- The lead inspector conducted a full tour of the school accompanied by the headteacher on the first day of the inspection. He visited all except one class.
- On the second day of the inspection, inspectors visited 22 parts of lessons, some accompanied by senior leaders.
- Inspectors met with 10 teachers at different stages of their careers and with different lengths of service at the school. They took into account seven responses to Ofsted’s confidential online staff survey.
- Inspectors spoke informally with eight parents outside the school and met a group of five parents formally. Inspectors also took account of 32 responses to Ofsted’s confidential online survey, Parent View. They considered 17 free text responses to this survey.
- Inspectors spoke informally to many pupils during the course of the inspection. On the first day of the inspection, the lead inspector met a group of six Year 6 pupils. None of the pupils completed Ofsted’s confidential online survey.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body and representatives of TKAT’s regional team, including the strategic regional executive director (SRED) and the regional executive director (RED).
- Inspectors examined a wide range of the school’s documentation, including policies and procedures, information about the school’s work to keep pupils safe, and information about the progress and attainment of current pupils.

Inspection team

Simon Hughes, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Peter Wibroe	Ofsted Inspector
Jonathan Shields	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Donovan	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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