

Shernold School

Hill Place, Queens Avenue, Maidstone, Kent ME16 0ER

Inspection dates

5–7 June 2018

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	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The leadership team provides clear direction for the school. Marked improvements in the school's work have ensured that it is well placed for the next stage in its development.
- Senior leaders have successfully tackled all the weaknesses identified at the time of the previous inspection. They are very well supported by the proprietor, the advisory board and the staff team.
- The school's happy, friendly and welcoming atmosphere ensures that pupils feel valued and secure.
- Pupils are keen learners and ambitious for their future. They behave well throughout the school.
- Pupils make rapid progress in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 are higher than the national average.
- Children in early years make strong progress and learn well.
- The quality and effectiveness of governance has improved rapidly during the past two years.
- The senior leadership team and the advisory board ensure that the school complies fully with the independent school standards.
- Parents and carers are highly supportive of the school. They appreciate the commitment and determination shown by all members of staff to secure the necessary improvements in the school's work since the previous inspection.
- Good-quality teaching ensures that pupils achieve well throughout the school. However, teaching does not always deepen and extend pupils' learning sufficiently, including for the most able pupils.
- Pupils become confident and proficient writers by the end of Year 6. However, teaching does not equip them effectively enough with the skills needed to check and improve their own writing.
- Pupils' mathematical problem-solving and reasoning skills are not fully developed.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that teaching consistently challenges pupils' thinking and extends their learning, including for the most able.
- Strengthen pupils' problem-solving and reasoning skills in mathematics.
- Teach pupils how to check, review and improve their written work effectively.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The proprietor, senior leaders and the staff team were shocked and upset by the findings of the previous inspection. However, since then, they have worked together tirelessly and successfully to restore the school's good name.
- The proprietor, senior leaders and advisory board have addressed each of the weaknesses identified at the time of the previous inspection. They have made sure that the school complies with the independent school standards and have put procedures in place to ensure that this continues to be the case.
- The leadership team is understandably pleased with the progress made since the previous inspection. However, it is not complacent about the school's success and has further ambitions for the school's future. Staff, parents and pupils share leaders' high aspirations.
- The proprietor, senior leaders and advisory board members have clarified and developed their roles and responsibilities well since the previous inspection. As a result, they are much clearer about their accountability for particular aspects of the school's work, including safeguarding and welfare issues.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher bring complementary skills and expertise to the school's leadership. They work very well as a team, each making an equally strong contribution to the school's development.
- Leaders have established a successful team of middle leaders who make a valuable contribution to school development. Middle leaders have an accurate view of the school's performance and work constructively with colleagues to secure improvements.
- Leaders have secured significant improvements in the curriculum in the past two years, so that pupils are better prepared for life in modern Britain. For example, reorganised curriculum plans ensure that pupils learn about British values in meaningful ways through sequences of lessons, assemblies, visits and visitors. As a result, pupils demonstrate a mature understanding and appreciation of values such as democracy and the rule of law.
- Parents recognise and appreciate the considerable improvements made since the previous inspection, including in the quality of leadership and safeguarding.
- The school's curriculum provides pupils with a broad and engaging education and successfully encourages respect for others, including those with protected characteristics.
- Good-quality teaching and a wide range of activities, both in and out of school, make a strong contribution to pupils' personal and academic progress. Leaders are now rightly focusing on making sure that all pupils, including the most able, achieve as fully as they should.
- Teachers are keen to contribute to the school's development and have welcomed opportunities to improve their practice. They are very pleased with improvements in the school since the previous inspection. Comments such as 'The school has been transformed', 'I'm happy and honoured to work in the school' and 'I feel listened to and able to voice my feelings' reflect significant improvements in the school's work and in staff morale in the past two years.
- Leaders have established a more outward-looking culture in the school since the previous

inspection. They have worked productively with local authority advisors to evaluate teaching, learning and leadership and have used training and visits to other schools well to raise teachers' expectations of pupils' learning. For example, recent visits to schools in the local area have underlined the need to develop pupils' writing and editing skills if they are to achieve as well as they should in English.

- In the past year, leaders have made changes to mathematics teaching to ensure that pupils learn how to solve problems and use reasoning skills more effectively. Although relatively recent, these improvements are already having a positive effect on the quality of pupils' mathematics work. However, this aspect of the school's work rightly remains a focus for the school's development.

Governance

- The establishment of an advisory board has been influential in the school's improvement since the previous inspection. The advisory board brings a wide range of skills and experience to the school, including expertise in safeguarding and education. It provides high-quality support and robust challenge for school leaders.
- The chair of the advisory board provides perceptive and skilful leadership for his team. He swiftly established a strong working relationship with senior leaders following the previous inspection. Since then, the advisory board has worked very well with the leadership team to steady the school and to prioritise improvements.
- The advisory board minutes give a clear picture of its work, including regular discussions with leaders about the quality of teaching and learning and about the implementation and success of recently established systems, such as the recently established assessment procedures. The headteacher's reports provide advisory board members with regular and comprehensive updates about the school's performance.
- In addition, advisory board members make good use of a range of activities, including visits to the school and local authority governance training, to supplement and strengthen their understanding of the school's work.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have put pupils' safety and well-being at the forefront of the school's work since the previous inspection. They have reviewed and overhauled health and safety policies and have made substantial improvements to safeguarding procedures. As a result, pupils are able to play and learn safely. Parents are confident that their children are in safe hands.
- The school works effectively with parents and agencies. The overwhelming majority of parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, say that their children are safe and happy in school.
- The school's safeguarding policy is published on the school's website. The policy meets current government requirements and provides valuable safeguarding information, including what to do in the case of a concern and how to contact the appropriate personnel.
- Leaders have revised and updated recruitment and suitability checks since the previous

inspection. For example, they have extended safeguarding checks to ensure that all adults who come into contact with pupils are suitable for their roles in the school, including volunteers and members of the advisory board.

- The headteacher and members of the advisory board routinely check that records are complete and that staff and advisory board members have completed required safeguarding training.
- Leaders and board members have rectified faults in the school premises identified at the time of the previous inspection. For example, they have completed a schedule of building and repair work during the past two years, including the replacement of worn or damaged equipment. As a result, the school provides pupils with an attractive, secure and well-equipped learning environment.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers plan interesting and engaging lessons which enthuse pupils about learning in a wide range of subjects. For example, pupils in Year 1 recently enjoyed opportunities to learn about geography while making passports to different countries, while the older pupils used research skills to understand the historical impact of Spanish exploration and regularly carry out experiments to develop scientific skills. Pupils say that lessons are fun and that they enjoy learning.
- Consistently effective teaching ensures that pupils achieve well in mathematics. For example, during the inspection, confident mathematics teaching enabled pupils in Year 5 to use their knowledge of number to convert measurements between millimetres, centimetres and kilometres.
- Teachers successfully encourage pupils to develop a love of reading. They make sure that pupils have regular opportunities to read a wide range of good quality books during their time in school. The school's well-stocked library provides an attractive and peaceful place for pupils to read and to enjoy books.
- The school's updated phonics scheme has made a dramatic difference to pupils' phonics and reading skills during the past two years. A consistent and thorough approach to teaching phonics ensures that pupils develop confident reading skills at an early stage of their education.
- Teaching assistants provide competent and sensitive support for pupils during lessons, including for those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. They use questioning well to help pupils to clarify their thinking and they successfully encourage and reassure those who find the work more difficult.
- The introduction of a robust system for tracking pupils' progress has made a significant difference to teachers' awareness of pupils' needs. Teachers assess pupils' learning accurately and they regularly discuss pupils' progress with senior leaders. Teachers use information about pupils' learning well to plan and shape lessons and activities for pupils of all abilities. However, there are times when teaching does not provide sufficient challenge, particularly for the most able pupils.
- In recent months, leaders have strengthened mathematics teaching to reflect increased national expectations of pupils' mathematical understanding. For example, teachers give pupils more frequent opportunities to demonstrate and explain their thinking when

solving mathematical problems than was the case at the previous inspection. While these developments are at a relatively early stage, improvements have already begun to have a positive effect on pupils' reasoning skills and on their progress in mathematics.

- Confident English teaching ensures that pupils achieve well in reading and writing. Teachers set written tasks in subjects across the curriculum so that pupils learn how to write effectively for a wide range of purposes and audiences. However, teaching does not equip pupils with the skills needed to edit and improve their written work fully enough.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- During the inspection, many parents, pupils and staff described the school as 'friendly, safe and happy'. This positive view is supported by a wide range of inspection evidence, including consideration of safeguarding records and questionnaire results.
- Pupils have a sensible view of safety issues and about what they can do to reduce everyday risks. For example, they know that it is unwise to share personal information on the internet.
- Pupils know who to speak to if they are worried. They are happy about the way the school helps them if they have any problems and say that teachers deal with concerns quickly.
- The school's strong community spirit ensures that pupils develop a keen sense of belonging. They are clearly proud of their school and of their achievements. For example, during an assembly pupils talked confidently about their experiences during the half term break, including their success in sports events.
- Strong relationships throughout the school ensure that pupils feel listened to, respected and secure. They are kind and thoughtful towards each other and staff.
- Pupils enjoy learning and are keen to do well. They attend regularly and participate enthusiastically in the life of the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils say that they have lots of friends in school and that behaviour is usually good. They have no concerns about bullying. However, they know how to spot it and report it if it happens.
- The school's records show that teachers and leaders deal appropriately with any behavioural issues and that repeated misbehaviour is rare.
- The overwhelming majority of pupils behave responsibly and sensibly in lessons and throughout the school. Occasionally, however, one or two pupils lack self-discipline during lessons. They find it hard to sustain concentration during lessons and lose focus, becoming fidgety or chatting to their neighbours. As a result, they complete less work than they should.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils learn well in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics, and standards at the end of Year 6 are regularly higher than the national average.
- The good-quality work in pupils' books provides a vivid illustration of the care they take with their work and their rapid progress.
- An updated approach to the teaching of phonics has contributed to marked improvements in pupils' early reading skills since the previous inspection. In 2017, the results of the Year 1 phonics screening check increased considerably and were much higher than the national average.
- Pupils enjoy reading. They younger pupils learn how to use strategies, including phonics, successfully to help them to read, while the older pupils read confidently, fluently and with expression.
- The most able pupils become proficient readers and develop a sophisticated understanding of texts. In 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in reading was well above national average in 2017.
- Pupils develop a secure knowledge of number and place value. This ensures that they are well equipped with the key knowledge needed to achieve well in mathematics.
- Improvements in mathematics teaching during the past year have led to a recent sharp increase in pupils' progress. More frequent opportunities for pupils to solve mathematical problems and to develop reasoning skills have ensured that pupils are more confident about tackling mathematics tasks and complete work of increasingly high quality. It will take more time, however, for these notable improvements in pupils' mathematical skills to build and strengthen across all year groups.
- Pupils make strong progress in writing. They learn how to write effectively for a wide range of purposes, successfully pitching the tone of their writing according to their audience. For example, during the inspection pupils in Year 6 used their research about Anglo-Saxons to construct lively interviews between historical characters. However, teaching does not equip pupils with the skills needed to check, amend and improve their written work fully enough.
- All groups of pupils, including the most able and pupils who speak English as an additional language, make strong progress and achieve well. However, some pupils could achieve even more, including the most able pupils. Teaching does not always extend pupils' learning and understanding as fully as it should.

Early years provision

Good

- The quality of early years provision has developed rapidly since the previous inspection. Leaders and teachers have worked constructively with local authority advisors to refresh and update teaching in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- The dramatic pace of development since the previous inspection led to a dip in children's outcomes at the end of early years in 2017, which were below the national average. However, improvements in teaching are now more established and the benefits are

evident in improved outcomes in 2018.

- Children settle into school life very well. They make friends quickly when they start school and develop strong relationships with adults. Children are enthusiastic learners and behave extremely well.
- Leaders have completely overhauled the outdoor area since the previous inspection. They have cleared untended areas, replaced damaged equipment and purchased new resources. As a result, the outdoor area now provides children with a safe, inviting and stimulating place for them to play and learn together.
- Teachers provide a wide selection of activities throughout the early years areas which reflect the national early years learning and development guidelines. They make good use of children's interests to engage them in learning and to develop their skills. Children work busily and happily with adults and with each other.
- Adults use discussions and questions well to explore children's knowledge and understanding. For example, during the inspection, a teacher in the Nursery class checked and reinforced children's understanding of how to use mathematical vocabulary such as 'big', 'bigger' and 'biggest' while comparing numbers during a dice game.
- Teaching equips children with secure reading skills. Children read regularly to an adult and develop a keen interest in books. For example, during the inspection, two children in the Reception class delighted in reading a favourite story to each other, pointing out the illustrations excitedly as they turned each page with anticipation.
- Children make very strong progress in developing writing skills. Adults provide children with plenty of stimulating opportunities to practise writing skills each day. As a result, children become confident writers. They learn how to form letters correctly and develop a consistent handwriting style.
- Leaders are understandably pleased with the progress made in developing early years provision since the previous inspection. However, they are keen to secure further improvements. They and the early years team share their colleagues' commitment to ensuring that children achieve as well as they should, including the most able, and to extending children's writing and mathematics skills.

School details

Unique reference number	118972
DfE registration number	886/6030
Inspection number	10047024

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	123
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Valerie Waite
Chair	Steve Sherry
Headteacher	Sandra Dinsmore
Annual fees (day pupils)	£7,200 to £7,800
Telephone number	01622 752868
Website	www.shernoldschool.co.uksh
Email address	shernold@shernold.plus.com
Date of previous inspection	20–22 April 2016

Information about this school

- Shernold School is an independent coeducational school which was registered in 1935. The last standard inspection of this school took place in April 2016, when it was judged inadequate. A subsequent progress monitoring inspection took place in January 2017, when the school was deemed to have met all of the independent school standards that were checked during the inspection.
- The school is situated in a residential area of Maidstone in a large Victorian detached house with outbuildings.
- The early years foundation stage (Kindergarten) consists of a Nursery and a Reception

class.

- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, although an increasing proportion are from other ethnic backgrounds. There are very few pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- The school does not make use of alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning during 14 lessons. Six of these observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspection team analysed a range of pupils' work and records of pupils' achievement.
- The lead inspector toured the school and its classrooms at different points during the inspection with the headteacher. An inspector also visited the school's breakfast club.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders, staff, pupils and parents during the inspection. They analysed 50 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 15 responses to the staff questionnaire. They also took account of emails received from parents during the inspection.
- Inspectors talked to pupils at different times during the inspection, including a more formal discussion with a small group of pupils, to gather their views of the school.
- Inspectors listened to pupils reading during the inspection.
- The inspection team reviewed a wide range of school documentation regarding the quality of education, safeguarding arrangements and the school's compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Clementina Aina

Ofsted Inspector

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