

# Inspection of a good school: Ulcombe Church of England Primary School

The Street, Ulcombe, Maidstone, Kent ME17 1DU

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Inspection dates:

27 November 2019

## **Outcome**

Ulcombe Church of England Primary School continues to be a good school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Ulcombe is a small, welcoming, inclusive school with a Christian ethos. High proportions of pupils join or leave the school during the year. Despite this high mobility, the school has a calm and stable atmosphere. Pupils are made very welcome when they join the school. New pupils settle quickly and easily slot into the school's routines. Pupils show respect for each other and adults in the school, including visitors. There is very little low-level disruption during lessons, which helps pupils to concentrate on learning. Teachers' high expectations mean that pupils behave well, work hard and make good progress from their starting points.

Parents and carers, pupils and staff all agree that pupils are safe. Staff know the pupils well and have good relationships with them. The school has a supportive, caring and nurturing ethos. Pupils are happy and enjoy school. Bullying is not a problem. Pupils are confident there is always someone to talk to if they are worried about something.

Since September, the school has been part of the Aspire Federation with three other schools. This reorganisation has further strengthened the leadership of the school. Parents speak positively about the school, but a few worry about the frequent changes of staff.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leadership of the curriculum has been improved. As part of the federation, the school benefits from specialist subject leaders and more time from a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). The federation has also introduced a new topic-based curriculum. Teachers and pupils are enjoying this new approach and lessons are engaging. These changes are having a positive impact on pupils' achievement, but it is too early to see their full effect.

The teaching of reading has a high priority and has been energised by specialist leadership. Recent training ensures that teachers and teaching assistants teach pupils to

learn phonics and read well. In lessons, we saw staff effectively addressing gaps in pupils' understanding. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the books that their teachers read to them and the opportunities they have to read to adults during the school day. Leaders have recently invested in new books that match pupils' reading ability. However, teachers do not consistently give reading books to lower-ability pupils that match the sounds pupils know.

The mathematics curriculum is planned carefully to pitch the work at different levels within each topic. Pupils are given problems that are appropriate for their age and stage of learning. Teachers check effectively how well pupils are progressing and provide extra support or challenge as necessary.

Not all subjects are as well planned as mathematics. The sequencing of knowledge and skills is not always as careful as it needs to be. Leaders are working with staff on this so that pupils learn as securely elsewhere as they do in mathematics.

A few pupils at the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, nearly half of the pupils receive extra help, as their attainment is lower than might be expected for their age. Leaders are tracking the impact of this extra help systematically. This is helping to identify whether more pupils would benefit from further specialist support.

Pupils who have joined the school since the start of the autumn term have settled quickly. They understand what is expected of them, behave well and concentrate on the task in hand. Adults help pupils to feel secure, gain confidence and communicate well with others.

Overall attendance rates are well below national levels. Most pupils attend regularly, but a large minority travel with their parents for work. The frequent absences lead to gaps in pupils' work and limit their chances of success. School leaders do all they reasonably can to improve attendance, given the school's context.

Pupils' performance in national tests is low. High levels of pupil mobility and frequent absence contribute to low attainment. Many pupils of all ages join the school with little prior schooling and low starting points. However, pupils make strong progress, sometimes from very low starting points. Leaders are ambitious for their pupils and are determined to raise pupils' achievement further.

Pupils participate in a range of local activities with pupils from other federation schools. This helps to broaden their experiences. The school also took part in a national careers project to raise pupils' aspirations.

The capable executive headteacher, ably supported by the head of school, is rightly proud of the inclusive, calm and purposeful culture that permeates the school. The new governing body is well led. Its clear vision for a broad and engaging curriculum is under way. Changes made have helped to reduce staff workload and this is appreciated by the workforce.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding has a high profile and there is a well-established safeguarding culture throughout the school. Clear systems exist to identify and support pupils at risk, so that pupils are safe in school. Staff know pupils well and this helps them to spot any changes in the well-being of pupils. When staff are concerned, they pass information on quickly. Governors check that the school keeps detailed records on the suitability of staff to work in school. These records are organised well.

Staff are very knowledgeable about the community they serve. This helps them to be aware of any potential risks and provide appropriate support for vulnerable families. The school works effectively with external agencies to provide suitable care for pupils.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have recently introduced a federation leadership structure which increases capacity and expertise in the leadership of SEND and the curriculum. Those new to post have already made headway in areas identified for improvement, but it is too early to see the full impact of their work. Leaders need to embed these structural changes so that their intended impact on the quality of education, including outcomes, can be fully realised.
- Books that some pupils read are not always carefully selected as they include sounds that pupils have not yet learned. As a result, reading books are too hard for some pupils who struggle to read words with fluency. Leaders need to ensure that staff choose books that match the pupils' current phonics knowledge.
- The school's curriculum is not yet sufficiently coherently planned in some subjects. Leaders need to ensure that teachers select and order the subject content to build knowledge sequentially so that pupils understand and remember key facts and ideas. It is clear from the actions that leaders have already taken that they are in the process of bringing this about.

## Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in April 2016.

## **How can I feed back my views?**

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## **Further information**

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	118631
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10111361
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	68
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Annie Allum
<b>Executive Headteacher</b>	Emma Hickling
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.ulcombe.kent.sch.uk">www.ulcombe.kent.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	27–28 April 2016

## Information about this school

- Ulcombe Church of England Primary School is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Since September, the school has been part of the Aspire Federation of four local schools, with a single governing body.
- Most of the pupils come from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds.
- There are very high numbers of pupils who enter and leave the school at different times of the year. Since the start of the autumn term, 11 pupils left and 18 joined the school. The amount of time pupils are at the school varies considerably. Quite a few go travelling and then return to the school several months later. Sometimes pupils enter the school in the later year groups with no previous schooling.
- Pupils are taught in three mixed-age classes.
- This is a voluntary-controlled Church of England school. The previous section 48 inspection of the school's distinctiveness as a Church of England school took place in 2016.

## Information about this inspection

- We held meetings with the executive headteacher, the head of school, the special educational needs coordinator and the subject leaders for reading and science.
- The lead inspector met four governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- The lead inspector spoke to the school adviser from the local authority on the telephone. The lead inspector met an attendance officer from the local authority and the head of the inclusion service to hear about leaders' work with families.
- We reviewed safeguarding records, including the central record of recruitment checks on staff.
- To help understand the quality of education, we looked in detail at some subjects. We did deep dives into reading, mathematics and science. We spoke with leaders for these subjects, visited lessons, talked with groups of pupils, looked at pupils' work and spoke with teachers.
- We considered how well the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.
- We spoke to pupils, staff and parents to gather their views about the school. Survey responses from 16 pupils, 14 members of staff and six parents were considered.

## Inspection team

Theresa Phillips, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Michael Green

Her Majesty's Inspector

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