

Inspection of a good school: Squirrels Heath Infant School

Salisbury Road, Romford, Essex RM2 5TP

Inspection dates:

17–18 December 2019

Outcome

Squirrels Heath Infant School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a happy infant school where pupils said that they can make friends and learn. Parents and carers told me that they love this school for its sense of community and caring for one another. Parents said that they feel welcomed into the school and that staff are approachable.

Pupils feel safe here. When asked about bullying, pupils said that it does not really happen, but if pupils are mean to each other, the teacher deals with it and it does not happen again. Pupils were seen working together, supporting each other in their work.

Behaviour in class was purposeful and pupils were engaged with their learning. During all the Christmas events, pupils remained calm and polite.

Leaders have developed a curriculum which supports pupils to become independent and inquisitive learners. Teachers want pupils to do well. Pupils were seen learning to think like authors and designers. Teachers provide pupils with opportunities to develop their understanding and to show when they have mastered a new skill.

The school has close links with the adjoined junior school, where many pupils have brothers and sisters.

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

Leaders have developed a curriculum which sparks pupils' interest in any given topic. Teachers give pupils a range of child- and adult-led activities which provide pupils with opportunities to follow their interests. Leaders have thought carefully about what pupils need to learn in each subject. Skills and knowledge are developed over time. Pupils were able to tell me how the skills they had learned in the previous year helped them with their current lesson. As this curriculum is new, leaders are reviewing it to make sure that it meets the needs of all pupils and that all staff have received the training needed to teach it. Leaders are developing assessment systems so that they can check whether all pupils

are learning more and remembering more.

Phonics is carefully planned so that pupils make rapid progress in learning the sounds each letter makes. Pupils are regularly assessed by the deputy headteacher to check their progress and understanding. Pupils who have fallen behind are given additional intensive teaching to help close these gaps. Books are well matched to pupils' reading abilities. Pupils are able to read most words within a text, giving them the confidence to attempt the unknown words using their developing phonics knowledge.

Teachers use books and reading as the foundation for writing. Each year group studies a book for a number of lessons. Pupils deepen their understanding of the author's intent. Pupils read poetry and nonfiction books which are linked to this text. Writing is further developed through class discussions and drama. Teachers provide pupils with a purpose for writing and opportunities to practise the vocabulary they will need before starting their writing. Pupils' writing is improving. However, leaders recognise that this approach is new and that some teachers need support in refining this.

Staff in the early years know their children well. Staff support children in the early development of writing. Adults help children to write simple sentences, using the children's ideas. Children are encouraged to extend their sentences as they become more confident writers. Children are enthusiastic about sharing their stories with staff. Children develop the confidence to become independent writers.

In design and technology, teachers were supported to develop their own skills through the training given during staff meetings. This meant that they had a clearer understanding of what pupils needed to know and understand. Pupils learned new skills ahead of designing their own products. Pupils learn to plan, design, make and review their products. In Year 1, parents had been invited into school to work alongside their pupils. This gave parents a clearer understanding of the school's ethos and they helped to support pupils to complete a challenging task.

Guest speakers and visits enrich the curriculum. A visit to Mountfitchet Castle was used to begin a series of lessons looking at castles. Pupils had a wide range of technical and literacy language to use in their drama, discussions and later in their own writing. The design and technology project was also linked. Pupils gained a good understanding of the features of castles.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported in the classroom. There are times when pupils do work in small groups or different areas of the school to support their learning.

The governing body has a good understanding of the strengths of the school and of the areas for development. Governors have ensured that what they have been told by the headteacher and her leaders is the case. They have used published information to shape their view and understand the trends and issues behind it. Governors have a good understanding of the work that leaders and staff are doing in writing and the changes to the curriculum.

Leaders support staff through high-quality training. This ensures that staff are more knowledgeable and better able to teach pupils. Staff who are new to the school were able to see the school's approach modelled for them by existing teachers. Staff appreciate the consideration that leaders have for their work-life balance. An example of this can be seen with leaders not sending staff emails outside of working hours.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The staff and governors are knowledgeable and well trained. They know how to spot signs that pupils may be at risk and act quickly to report concerns. Leaders who are responsible for safeguarding work closely with outside agencies. Leaders are determined in their efforts to refer pupils in need to the correct agencies. Staff know vulnerable pupils well and are proactive in supporting families in need of help.

Parents who responded to the survey and who I spoke to on the playground told me that their children are safe and happy here. Pupils also know who to speak to if they have any concerns or worries.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have identified that the school's approach to teaching writing is new and has not yet been fully embedded. Consequently, leaders need to ensure that all pupils have the skills they need. Leaders should ensure that all staff are secure with the new approach.
- The planning for foundation subjects is new. Leaders need to continue to develop the curriculum in these areas so that there are secure assessment systems and training opportunities for staff. Leaders should monitor to ensure that staff are secure with this new system.

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 second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in July 2011.

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

Unique reference number	102304
Local authority	Havering
Inspection number	10110483
Type of school	Infant
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	242
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Andrew Pettet
Headteacher	Julie White
Website	www.squirrelsheath.com/
Date of previous inspection	22 March 2016

Information about this school

- Squirrels Heath Infant School has three classes in each year group.
- The headteacher has been with the school since 2014 and was in post at the time of the previous inspection.
- The school has a pre-school provision run by an outside provider on the same site.

Information about this inspection

- I met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and members of staff. I also met with members of the governing body and Havering Local Authority.
- I did deep dives in these subjects: reading, writing, and design and technology. For each of these subjects I held discussions with subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke with staff and pupils, and I looked at pupils' work.
- I spoke with parents and considered the 95 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including the free-text responses from parents.
- I spoke with pupils and staff about the school's work to keep pupils safe. I also considered safeguarding records, documentation and the school's single central record of staff suitability checks.

Inspection team

Adam Vincent, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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