

# Inspection of Dymchurch Primary School

New Hall Close, Dymchurch, Romney Marsh, Kent TN29 0LE

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Inspection dates: 26 and 27 April 2022

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Early years provision

**Requires improvement**

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

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

Pupils at Dymchurch Primary School feel well supported and cared for. From Reception to Year 6, children are happy. They feel that their individual qualities, talents and achievements are recognised and celebrated by staff. Pupils are confident to talk to staff about any worries they might have, and they know that staff will take those worries seriously.

Pupils try their hardest with their learning. They enjoy the activities that staff provide for them. They are proud of the work that they produce. The school's curriculum is currently being redeveloped, but at present, weaknesses in the design of the school's curriculum mean that pupils are not achieving the best possible outcomes.

There is a respectful culture at the school. Pupils treat each other with kindness and respect. They listen carefully to what staff are asking of them. Classrooms are settled and focused. Pupils feel well supported with their well-being and mental health. Pupils understand that everyone might experience feelings of worry or sadness sometimes. This makes them feel more confident in sharing their feelings and seeking help when they need to.

Parents have been worried about instability in school leadership and staffing. Some parents feel that the school does not communicate well with them about their child. Parents recognise that, despite this turbulence, children at Dymchurch are happy, and school staff care deeply about pupils and their families.

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

Following the last inspection, in June 2018, it became clear that the multi-academy trust, that the school was then part of, was not able to support it to bring about the required improvements. The pandemic made it harder for any external support to be put in place. In June 2021, the former multi-academy trust merged with a larger, more established multi-academy trust. A new trust was formed. The school is now a part of this new trust. The school does not have a permanent headteacher. The trust has recently appointed an experienced headteacher from within the trust as acting headteacher. The trust is advertising the role of permanent headteacher.

Executive leaders within the new multi-academy trust very quickly identified serious concerns about the school. They found that the school's leadership team were not performing their role effectively. In addition, there were weaknesses in the governance arrangements for the school. The education that pupils were receiving was poor, and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were not being identified accurately, nor were they getting the right support.

Weaknesses in the governance arrangements were quickly addressed, as the new trust has an effective board of trustees. Their work is supported by local governors, who are committed to the school.

The members of the trust's central team are currently leading the day-to-day running of the school. They know the school and its community well. They share a clear sense of moral purpose and want the very best for the pupils. Their support has provided much needed stability, and a great many improvements have been made this academic year.

Trust leaders have worked closely with phase and curriculum leaders within the school to develop their expertise. As a result, curriculum leaders are developing a better understanding of their role and how to perform it. Curriculum plans are being developed, although in some subjects these need further work to ensure that they are ambitious, logically sequenced and designed to give children, particularly the most disadvantaged, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed.

In reading and mathematics, work is further developed. There is a well-sequenced curriculum in place, and teachers have been trained well to teach this curriculum. Pupils are now making better progress in mathematics.

Leaders have carefully considered the books that pupils will read across the curriculum from Reception to Year 6. Pupils have positive attitudes towards reading, but older pupils do not yet read widely and with depth of understanding. A phonics programme was introduced in September 2019, but the teaching of phonics is still inconsistent. Leaders know that there is more work to do to ensure that all staff understand how to teach phonics well, and to ensure that the weakest readers are taught by staff with the highest levels of expertise. The books that pupils read within the phonics programme do match the sounds they have learned. However, the impact of this is diluted by a parallel reading programme that introduces texts that do not match the sounds that pupils have learned.

Provision for pupils with SEND is rapidly improving. The special educational needs coordinator has been supported by the trust inclusion lead to develop systems in the school to ensure that pupils with SEND are identified early and supported. The individual staff who support pupils with SEND have been trained to support individual pupils very effectively. Leaders know that the next step is to ensure that all teachers understand the needs of the pupils in their class and know how to effectively support them in learning the curriculum.

Leaders introduced a new curriculum for personal, social and health education in September 2021. This curriculum is now embedding well and is developing pupils' understanding of important issues such as healthy relationships and consent.

Staff at all levels are highly committed to the pupils and to the wider community. Staff feel that they have been very well supported by the multi-academy trust since June 2021. Despite the challenges the school has faced over time, there is now a real sense of optimism about its future.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders within the multi-academy trust are working closely with school leaders to ensure that pupils at Dymchurch Primary School are safe. In September 2021, a new safeguarding system was implemented. Staff understand the system and know how to use it to raise a concern. The new system is enabling leaders to accurately triangulate all the information held about each vulnerable pupil to ensure that they precisely get the right help. Leaders monitor and review safeguarding concerns very carefully to ensure that any identified concerns are quickly responded to. External referrals are made appropriately. The school drives a 'team around the child' approach where there are complex concerns that require support from more than one agency. Safer recruitment procedures are followed. Leaders ensure that any allegations about adults are appropriately referred and managed.

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

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

- Leaders have not ensured that the teaching of phonics is consistently effective. Sometimes, the lowest attaining readers receive the weakest teaching. Leaders need to ensure that the phonics programme is implemented effectively, with consistency and rigour.
- The books pupils read do not always match the sounds they have learned. Leaders need to ensure that, for pupils who are still learning the alphabetic code, all the books they read are precisely matched to help them to practise and apply the sounds they have learned.
- Leaders have an ambitious vision for the school's curriculum. In some subjects, however, leaders have not sequenced the curriculum coherently or logically to enable pupils to build their knowledge and skills towards the agreed end points. Leaders need to consider the end points that the curriculum in all subjects is building towards, and what pupils will know and be able to do, and then carefully plan the curriculum accordingly. In setting out the curriculum leaders need to identify the knowledge that they consider most important in each subject and ensure that it is taught in a logical progression, systematically and explicitly.
- Leaders have not yet completed the planning and designing of the school's curriculum for early years. Leaders need to continue their work to develop the early years curriculum, ensuring that that it is designed to give children, particularly the most disadvantaged, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in key stage 1 and beyond by specifically addressing known gaps in children's knowledge. In particular, the leaders must ensure a sharper focus and greater clarity in respect of developing children's communication and language.
- Instability in senior school leadership has meant that, over time, development planning has not always been sufficiently precise or robustly monitored by senior

school leaders. Senior leaders need to ensure that school development plans more precisely identify those things that will make the greatest difference to pupils. Senior leaders need to ensure that they are evaluating the impact of their actions and planning next steps accordingly and strategically.

## 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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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 the school and 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>	142347
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10227338
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	169
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Helen Stewart
<b>Acting headteacher</b>	Nicki Man
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.dymchurch.kent.sch.uk">www.dymchurch.kent.sch.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	19 and 20 June 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The acting headteacher took up post in April 2022, a week before this inspection.
- The school is currently using one alternative provider. This provider is not required to be registered.
- The school operates a breakfast and after-school club for pupils of the school.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with leaders within the multi-academy trust, including the chief executive officer and the acting headteacher. Inspectors spoke with the chair of trustees and representatives of the local governing body.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, art and design and history. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors listened to pupils reading and talked to pupils across the school about their love of reading.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about a range of additional national curriculum subjects.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about the curriculum in early years. They visited Reception to understand how plans were being implemented.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record and spoke to trust and school leaders, staff and pupils. Throughout the inspection, leaders considered and checked the culture of safeguarding within the school.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including school improvement plans and minutes from recent meetings of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors talked to pupils formally and informally about their learning, what behaviour is like at school and whether they felt safe at school.
- Inspectors reviewed 16 responses to the survey for staff and 20 responses to the parents' survey, including the associated free-text comments. Inspectors spoke to parents and carers at the gate during the inspection.

### **Inspection team**

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jenny Ashley-Jones

Ofsted Inspector

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