

Inspection of Amherst School

Witches Lane, Riverhead, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 2AX

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 May 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Amherst School is a warm and welcoming community where leaders do whatever it takes to help every child flourish. Pupils love their time at school, not least because of the enormous range of opportunities on offer. Pupils benefit from a fabulous array of extra-curricular activities, from sports and music clubs to chess and juggling.

Pupils describe the school as a special place to be. This environment helps pupils to become remarkably confident and self-assured. Their exceptional behaviour and attitudes reflect the school's values of trust, kindness, determination, politeness, fairness and cooperation. Bullying is extremely rare at the school. Pupils feel safe and have absolute trust in adults to resolve any issues that arise.

Parents and pupils feel proud to have this school in their local community. Summing up the feelings of many, one parent wrote, 'Amherst allows every child to thrive. It is a welcoming, positive and trusting school that provides amazing educational support'.

Leaders have planned a broad and varied curriculum. Pupils develop a love of learning due to engaging experiences within and beyond the school. Recently, leaders have focused on strengthening the curriculum further to enhance pupils' learning.

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

Leaders have prioritised their work around the quality of education and reviewed the curriculum. They have considered what they want pupils to know and be able to do by the time they leave Year 6. In English and mathematics, well-established approaches enable pupils to recall their previous learning. This helps pupils to understand how this supports their current and future learning. Leaders are using this model to strengthen pupils' learning in other subject areas. However, in a minority of foundation subjects, such as geography and art, leaders acknowledge that they have not yet identified the precise knowledge they want pupils to learn. As a result, pupils' knowledge is not secure in some aspects of these subjects.

Leaders check pupils' understanding and identify gaps in knowledge. Teachers use this information well in English, mathematics and science. However, checks in some other subjects are not as effective. These do not give teachers sufficient information to shape future teaching. This means that in a minority of subjects, pupils' learning does not always build on what they already know.

There are accurate systems to identify pupils who have additional needs. Teachers make regular checks to see how well pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are doing. They are supported well.

Leaders and teachers prioritise reading. Pupils become avid and enthusiastic readers. Leaders ensure that any pupils who need extra help, including pupils with SEND, receive it as soon as they start in Year 3. These pupils catch up quickly because of the valuable support they receive.

The English curriculum is designed to engage pupils in reading and learning from good-quality texts. Pupils speak positively about the school's 'book projects' and how these help them to improve the quality of their writing. Books are chosen carefully to link to other areas of the curriculum. For example, pupils in Year 5 increased their knowledge of the Victorians through their study of a novel set in this historical period.

Pupils' personal development is promoted exceptionally well. The school motto, 'Inspire Every Pupil', is evident in all aspects of school life. Pupils learn about different faiths and cultures, and appreciate the importance of the different beliefs and lifestyles in society. Adults forge strong and positive relationships with the pupils in the school.

Leaders maximise their impact through the way they inspire, motivate and develop others. Without exception, staff say that the headteacher is considerate of their workload and well-being.

Governors are part of the school's open and honest culture. They provide robust challenge to leaders, which leaders listen to and act upon. Governors know the school well and are right to have confidence in its leadership.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is interwoven into the school's culture and curriculum. Leaders ensure that safeguarding is a high priority and that staff understand their responsibilities. All staff and governors are well trained. Robust procedures ensure that any concerns are quickly identified. Leaders work with a range of external agencies to ensure that, when needed, pupils receive swift help and specialist support. There is also a proactive approach to keeping children safe through the curriculum. Pupils are knowledgeable about how to keep themselves safe online.

Leaders and governors ensure that the required pre-employment checks are carried out.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a minority of foundation subjects, such as geography and art, leaders are at an early stage of identifying the precise knowledge they want pupils to learn. As a result, pupils' knowledge in these subjects is not yet secure. Leaders should

identify and sequence the specific knowledge they want pupils to know and remember. This will support teachers in ensuring that new knowledge builds on existing knowledge. Leaders need to complete the process of reviewing the curriculum within their identified timescale. For this reason, the transitional arrangements have been applied.

- Assessment in a minority of foundation subjects is not fully developed. This means that in these subjects, teachers do not have precise information about how well pupils have remembered important knowledge. Leaders should ensure that assessment is further refined in these subjects to provide teachers with the information they need to plan learning that builds on what pupils already know and can do, and ensure that pupils' learning is secure.

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

Unique reference number	136499
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10211977
Type of school	Junior
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	377
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Louise Austin
Headteacher	Andrew Reid
Website	www.amherst.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 January 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There is a daily breakfast club and after-school club managed by the school.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the leader responsible for SEND and curriculum leaders. The lead inspector held a meeting with members of the local governing body, including the chair of governors.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors considered school policies, documents and records and the school's record of recruitment checks. The lead inspector also met with the designated lead for safeguarding.

- Inspectors took account of a wide range of information, including the school's improvement plans and minutes of meetings.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. Inspectors also reviewed attendance and other information provided by school leaders.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents expressed in the 107 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and parents' free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the 33 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 160 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. An inspector spoke with parents on the second day of the inspection.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, history and science. For each deep dive, inspectors spoke with curriculum leaders, teachers and pupils. Inspectors visited lessons and looked at a sample of pupils' work. Inspectors also considered the curriculum and pupils' work across a range of other subjects.

Inspection team

Jo Lakey, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Vicky Matthews	Ofsted Inspector
Katherine Russell	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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