

Inspection of Marden Primary Academy

Goudhurst Road, Marden, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 9JX

Inspection dates: 28 February and 1 March 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

It is a pleasure to meet the happy and enthusiastic pupils at Marden Primary Academy. They reflect the school's values of 'ready, respect, safe' in all that they do. Parents describe the school as having 'a strong community feel, which is hugely inclusive'.

Leaders have ensured that expectations for pupils to behave and work well are very high, including in the early years. Pupils treat each other with respect and kindness in all year groups and celebrate each other's differences. As a result, bullying is extremely rare, and pupils have every confidence that staff will resolve it if it does happen. Pupils share warm and trusting relationships with staff, who model positive behaviours.

Marden Primary Academy is a happy school where pupils immerse themselves in the life of the school and local community. For instance, they take part in the Easter bonnet parade and produce artwork for the 'Poppy Walk' to commemorate Remembrance Day.

Pupils enjoy taking part in a vast range of clubs and trips to enrich their learning. For example, a visit to Ypres helped pupils in key stage 2 to develop their understanding of the First World War. Leaders are careful to ensure that those who would benefit most attend the clubs and enrichment activities that are on offer.

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

Leaders have implemented a new and highly ambitious curriculum for all pupils. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), who access the same learning as their peers. Leaders have made sure that the curriculum builds on what pupils have already learned from Reception to Year 6. For example, pupils develop their learning about 'dwellings' in the early years to explore 'empires' in Year 3 history. Subject leaders work closely with staff, from the early years upwards, so that they know which key knowledge pupils must learn.

Leaders use their expertise to support staff in developing strong subject knowledge. In a small number of subjects, they are working to ensure that all staff use key terms and concepts more consistently. Teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to revisit and recall their learning so that they can check what they know well. They use this information to change their planning so that any gaps can be filled. In subjects where the curriculum is in the earlier stages of development, pupils have less secure knowledge. Staff are taking actions to address this.

Expectations for learning are high. However, in a small number of lessons, a few pupils find the work tricky to access, as it is too ambitious for them. Pupils with SEND are identified quickly and receive the adaptations and support they need to achieve success.

Leaders have made reading a priority in the school. Pupils in all year groups enjoy reading during 'Mr T' reading time. Children in the early years talk excitedly about who will be their 'mystery reader'. Leaders have rapidly implemented a phonics programme that teachers deliver with expertise. This has had a swift and positive impact on helping pupils to read with speed and accuracy.

Pupils enjoy school. They work hard and take pride in their work. Learning is their priority, and they come to school ready to listen and engage. They know that it is okay to make mistakes as long as they learn from them. Leaders are persistent in trying to ensure that the small number of pupils who do not come to school regularly attend more often.

Children in the early years waste no time in getting off to a good start. They learn routines and expectations quickly from staff, who care about them. There is a range of opportunities planned for children to enjoy, indoors and outdoors. They are focused on their learning and show some independence. However, sometimes, adults step in too quickly or do not fully explain what a child can do differently in order to succeed.

The curriculum for personal development is a real strength. Pupils learn about important topics, including healthy relationships and finance, in an age-appropriate way. They develop an understanding of moral issues, such as the impact of fast fashion, through the 'skills builder' programme. Pupils become competent leaders as house captains, play leaders and members of the reading council. They develop a strong sense of community and citizenship in all phases. For example, children take responsibility for running a 'community café' in Reception, while pupils in Year 6 take part in an enterprise project to fund a restaurant for parents.

Governors and leaders at all levels have worked tirelessly to ensure that the school has experienced substantial and positive change. They have a clear and shared vision for the future of the school and a commitment to continued improvement. Staff are part of a close-knit team and feel valued by leaders, who invest greatly in their development. As one parent commented, 'the school continues to get better and better every week'.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders responsible for safeguarding ensure that record-keeping is excellent so that they can easily monitor pupils who they are worried about. They act quickly when they are concerned and are persistent in ensuring that pupils receive the specialist external support that they and their families might need. Staff receive training so that they know how to identify and refer pupils who might be at risk. Leaders carry out the appropriate checks so that all adults are safe to work in the school.

Pupils feel safe in the school. They learn how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. They know who to report any worries to.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum in some subjects is still at an early stage of development. This means that the expert practice that is seen more widely across the curriculum is not yet fully secure in a small number of subjects. Leaders need to continue to provide staff, particularly those who are newly appointed, with time and professional development opportunities, to ensure that the intended curriculum is consistently well embedded in all subjects.
- Adults in the early years do not yet consistently maximise opportunities for children to explore ideas further and develop independence in their learning. Leaders need to continue to support staff in sharpening their practice so that effective questioning and engagement are used consistently well to develop children's independence, resilience and understanding.

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.

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	148116
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10241308
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	285
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Frank Green
Principal	Niall Dosad
Website	www.mardenprimaryacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Marden Primary Academy converted to become an academy school in September 2020. When its predecessor school, Marden Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- There is an on-site breakfast and after-school club, which is run by the school.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The school is one of 30 schools that form the Leigh Academies Trust.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded 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.

- The inspection team completed deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics, Spanish, music and history. To do this, they met with subject leaders, had discussions with staff and pupils, visited lessons and looked at pupils' work. The lead inspector also reviewed curriculum plans with subject leaders for art, science and geography.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school and priorities for improvement.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, a selection of subject leaders, teachers, including early career teachers, and support staff.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative from the trust board and members of the academy board, including the chair. The lead inspector also met separately with an academy director and the chief executive officer of the trust.
- The inspection team reviewed the arrangements for safeguarding by scrutinising records and through discussion with staff and pupils.
- The views of pupils, parents and staff were considered through discussions and outcomes of Ofsted's surveys.

Inspection team

Zoë Harris, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Martin Hacker	Ofsted Inspector
Lorraine Clarke OBE	Ofsted Inspector

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