

Inspection of Groombridge St Thomas' Church of England Primary School

Corseley Road, Groombridge, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN3 9SF

Inspection dates: 25 and 26 April 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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

This school was last inspected 14 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy to be part of this school. They are proud of the values of excellence, compassion and enthusiasm that are threaded through all of school life. Pupils know that all staff want the best for them. They are motivated by the 'Groombridge aspirations' and are keen to behave well and work hard. Leaders have set high expectations for learning and behaviour and, as a result, pupils achieve well.

Pupils feel safe. They understand what bullying is and all have trusted adults they can speak to if they are worried. There is very little bullying here. Staff are swift to resolve any unkindness that might happen. There are strong relationships between pupils and adults that start right from the early years.

This is an inclusive school. Pupils understand why it is important to celebrate each other's differences. All pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), benefit from being fully included in school life. This is particularly evident in the sporting opportunities offered both in school and as part of the wider curriculum. Parents praise the nurturing environment, where they see their children thriving and being developed as individuals.

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

Leaders across the school have improved the curriculum. They recognise that there is still work to do and have a clear plan in place. They have prioritised the core subjects of mathematics, reading and writing. These are well sequenced from the early years through to Year 6. Teachers have good subject knowledge and have benefited from high-quality training. Where the curriculum has been precisely thought through, pupils confidently remember and apply their learning. In a minority of subjects, such as history, there is still work to do. In these areas, some of the learning is not connected well enough from early years to Year 6. This means that, over time, pupils do not remember as much as they could.

Teachers routinely check pupils' understanding at the end of lessons. They use this information to support pupils, particularly those with SEND, to access future learning. However, in a few subjects, including some areas of early years, the tasks set do not enable pupils to know more and remember more. In these cases, pupils remember the tasks but not the learning that the activities were intended to provide.

Early reading is taught consistently well. Leaders ensure that teachers focus on those who are at the early stages of learning to read. The phonics programme is used effectively to support all pupils and is followed consistently by teachers. Leaders quickly identify pupils who lack confidence or fluency with reading and put in place effective support. Teachers promote a love of reading from the early years. Pupils love the stories that their teachers read to them every day. Leaders have encouraged the local community to become part of this reading culture. Parents

enjoy the opportunity to be a 'mystery reader' and are involved in developing the school library.

Pupils show care and kindness in lessons and around the school, including at playtime. Bullying is not tolerated. Relationships are at the heart of every interaction and staff have high expectations. Overall, pupils meet these high expectations. Staff address any slips calmly and quickly so that learning is not disturbed. Tolerance is part of the school's culture, and pupils are respectful of each other's differences. Leaders have set high expectations for attendance, which is improving.

Leaders ensure that pupils have access to a wide range of opportunities, particularly in sports. Pupils have strengthened links with the local community by attending events such as the village fair and maypole dancing. As a result, pupils understand how to cooperate well with others. Pupils enjoy learning about the world around them and are confident in recognising the difference between right and wrong.

Leaders have prioritised the well-being and workload of all staff. They are proactive in their support and have carefully considered what training and support will be the most impactful. Staff appreciate this. They are proud to work for the school and to be an integral part of the village community. The new headteacher has provided a clear direction for the school.

The interim executive board has helped to strengthen leadership throughout the school. The board members provide well-considered support and challenge for the school and fulfil their statutory duties consistently. The local authority and the diocese provide additional support and guidance. This, alongside school leaders, has ensured rapid and sustained progress.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is a high priority at this school. Staff are well trained and know what to do if they have concerns. Leaders understand what the most important safeguarding issues are in their local area and have adapted training and the curriculum to address these carefully. Leaders, including those responsible for governance, understand their statutory duties and have consistently checked the quality and impact of the school's systems.

Pupils can name a trusted adult who they feel confident talking to if they have any worries. Leaders ensure that pupils learn how to identify risk and keep themselves safe, including when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some areas of the curriculum, the sequencing of knowledge is not yet complete. Pupils remember information, but it is not always connected in a way that builds into a rich and deep body of knowledge. Leaders need to continue with their ambitious redesign of the final few subjects to ensure that knowledge develops cumulatively from Reception through to Year 6.
- Teachers' knowledge and pedagogical strategies are not yet consistently strong across all subjects. This means that teachers can sometimes set work for pupils that does not help pupils to learn the knowledge they need. Leaders need to ensure that staff have the knowledge and confidence required to implement the planned curriculum successfully.

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

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| Unique reference number | 114559 |
| Local authority | East Sussex |
| Inspection number | 10256330 |
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 4 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 187 |
| Appropriate authority | Interim executive board |
| Chair | Penny Gaunt |
| Headteacher | Caroline Powell |
| Website | www.groombridgest-thomas.e-sussex.sch.uk |
| Dates of previous inspection | 20 and 21 February 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- There have been many staffing changes since the last inspection. There is a newly formed leadership team. The headteacher took up role in September 2022.
- Governance is enacted through an interim executive board as a result of a local authority warning notice in March 2021.
- This school is part of the Diocese of Chichester. The last inspection of the school's religious character was in February 2020.
- The school runs its own breakfast club provision, which was part of this inspection.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

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.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector listened to some pupils read to adults who the pupils knew.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors held meetings with designated safeguarding leads, governors, staff and pupils. They scrutinised the single central record and checked safeguarding records. They examined case studies and checked actions.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other members of the leadership team. The lead inspector met virtually with the chair of the interim executive board and four other members of the board. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative from the local authority and a representative from the diocese.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons. They also spoke to pupils in lessons and during playtimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors considered a range of documents, including leaders' evaluations of the school, their school improvement plan and minutes from board meetings, policies and published info about pupils.
- Inspectors spoke to parents and carers and also took into account their responses on Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors took account of the views of staff through conversations and the responses to the online staff survey.

Inspection team

Emma Law, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

James Broadbridge

His Majesty's Inspector

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