

Inspection of Ridgmont Lower School

High Street, Ridgmont, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK43 0TS

Inspection dates: 20 and 21 June 2023

| Overall effectiveness | Requires improvement |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| The quality of education | Requires improvement |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Good |
| Personal development | Good |
| Leadership and management | Requires improvement |
| Early years provision | Requires improvement |
| Previous inspection grade | Good |

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a happy school where pupils grow up within a harmonious and kindly community. There is a family feel around the school, with birthday celebrations and a house points system to celebrate good behaviour. Pupils learn the importance of good manners. Everyone aspires to be a 'finer diner' at lunchtimes.

In some lessons, pupils are interested in their learning. They do their best with the tasks they are given. They are confident to ask adults for help when they need it. In other lessons, and the early years, tasks do not engage or extend pupils. When this happens, some pupils lose concentration and do not achieve as well as they should.

Pupils enjoy their time together. The youngest children play imaginative games in small groups. Pupils of all ages mix cheerfully at breaktimes in the extensive grounds. They are proud to be welcoming and friendly.

Pupils know and understand the school rules. They understand that actions have consequences and that these are fair. Pupils understand that bullying is wrong. It happens very rarely. Pupils trust their teachers to resolve any incidences of bullying swiftly.

Pupils can develop their interests with a limited number of clubs at times during the year such as drama club. An outdoor club enables pupils to take appropriate risks and learn more about the natural world.

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

The small, committed, leadership team is working hard to establish a curriculum that sets out what pupils are to learn. However, this is not consistently well developed or put into place, so pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

In too many subjects, and in the early years, leaders' plans are not well developed or not taught as leaders intend due to lack of relevant resources, training, or because at times staff are stretched too thinly in what they are trying to provide. In these subjects, pupils do not achieve well. In some subjects, however, leaders have put plans in place effectively. Teachers know what pupils should learn in these subjects. They teach this clearly and check that everyone understands. They give extra support to those who need it. In these subjects, pupils are interested, enthusiastic and remember what they have learned.

In the early years, adults do not plan or deliver the curriculum consistently well. Adults do not always develop children's vocabulary or extend their skills. Some adults do not understand what children already know and what they need to practise or to learn next across the curriculum. The youngest children play creatively. They learn to share and work together.

In early reading, leaders have adopted a curriculum that sets out clearly what pupils will learn in small steps. Regular checks enable leaders to group pupils according to their needs. However, the work provided for these groups does not always move the learning on quickly enough. This is because some adults do not have the expertise to teach phonics well. Also, adults are sometimes trying to teach different groups at the same time. When this happens, some pupils are slow to get started or lose concentration on their work. Despite this, most pupils learn to read well and enjoy reading. Leaders quickly spot any pupils who need extra help with learning to read. These pupils get support to catch up, but the reading books are not matched closely enough to the phonics they are learning. Pupils do not get sufficient practice with their new skills to rapidly develop fluency and confidence.

Leaders make sure pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) get the right help. Plans are clearly written with precise targets and provision to meet the identified needs. Leaders seek out extra help from external professionals and use their advice to tailor the support they put in place. Pupils with SEND take part in all aspects of school life alongside their peers. However, they experience the same inconsistencies in teaching as their classmates.

Behaviour around the school is calm and sensible. Pupils work cooperatively in class. Pupils who need extra help to manage their behaviour are well supported. Staff are quick to spot any inattentive behaviour in lessons and provide reminders of their expectations. Leaders secure good attendance.

Pupils learn about healthy relationships and lifestyles. Leaders encourage pupils to develop independence and confidence in their own ideas. Older pupils enjoy opportunities to take responsibility such as pouring water for others at lunchtime. Pupils learn about diversity in the world beyond their school.

There is a close-knit, supportive staff team. Governors take their responsibilities for staff workload and well-being seriously. Their work to secure broad, high-quality educational provision has been impacted by ongoing challenges to secure the best possible future for the school. Leaders have not been able to make improvements as rapidly as they wished.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a culture across the school where the safety of pupils comes first. Adults are well trained to spot, report and record any signs of concern. Leaders are proactive in securing the help of external agencies to keep pupils safe.

Appropriate checks on adults in school are carried out and recorded accurately. Governors regularly check that agreed and required safeguarding processes are in place.

Pupils learn to stay safe through the personal, health, social and economic curriculum in place from the early years. They also learn about how to stay safe online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, leaders' curriculum plans are clear. However, at times, staff do not have the training or capacity to put these plans in place as intended. As a result, provision is not always well matched to what pupils already know and need to learn next. Leaders should ensure that staff have the training and resources they need to put these plans in place as intended.
- The curriculum for the early years does not clearly set out what children are to learn and how this will be assessed. As a result, too much is left to the expertise of adults in the setting to know children well and make the right choices to extend children's learning. Leaders should develop further a well-sequenced and ambitious curriculum for the early years and ensure that staff have the expertise to put this in place well.
- Reading books do not always closely match the phonic knowledge that pupils are learning. Some pupils, therefore, do not get sufficient practice to rapidly become fluent and confident readers. Leaders should ensure that all pupils learning to read have well-matched, decodable reading books.
- Leaders have been operating amid uncertainty and staffing challenges. This has reduced the capacity of leaders to work strategically and optimise provision. Leaders should ensure that all staff have the expertise and capacity to secure high standards of provision across the school.

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 | 109476 |
| Local authority | Central Bedfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10268052 |
| Type of school | First |
| School category | Maintained |
| Age range of pupils | 3 to 9 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 28 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governing body | Christine Sweetnam |
| Headteacher | Allison Jakes |
| Website | www.ridgmont-lower.org.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 23 March 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- The number of pupils on the school roll has decreased during a period of uncertainty about the future of the school.
- Leaders do not use any off-site providers of alternative education.

Information about this inspection

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

- This was the second 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 inspectors met with governors and other school leaders, including the head teacher and special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history and music. For each deep dive, the inspectors spoke with

subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons where possible, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- The inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead and other staff to discuss safeguarding in the school.
- The inspectors considered the five responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the two responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. No responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, were received.
- The inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences of school life and their learning in lessons to understand what it is like to be a pupil at this school. Inspectors also observed the behaviour of pupils at breaktimes and around the school.

Inspection team

Lynne Williams, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Karen Stanton

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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