

Lower Halstow Primary School

School Lane, Lower Halstow, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 7ES

Inspection dates

13–14 March 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The executive headteacher leads and manages the school effectively. The head of school and other leaders support her well.
- Teaching is typically good. Teachers plan purposeful lessons so that pupils learn well.
- The curriculum provides pupils with a range of interesting and exciting learning opportunities.
- Governors challenge and support leaders effectively. They know the school well and check that actions bring improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Disadvantaged pupils do well in most subjects, due to the effective monitoring, support and guidance they receive.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress because of the well-planned support they receive.
- Pupils behave well in lessons, around the school and in the playground. They feel safe and happy and are well looked after.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is developed very well. Through lessons and assemblies, pupils talk about how they can show care and respect for others.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are good. Staff are particularly good at helping pupils develop secure relationships.
- Staff say they are proud to be part of the school community and show great commitment to tackling the issues identified by the new executive headteacher.
- Parents are supportive of the work the school does. They appreciate the opportunities that the school provides for the children.
- The majority of pupils are making good progress from their starting points, but their progress in mathematics in key stage 2 has not been as strong as in other subjects, as pupils do not deepen their understanding of mathematical ideas. Some of the most able pupils are not making as much progress as they could in mathematics.
- The work of some middle leaders is underdeveloped. Some are new to their roles and have not had time to lead improvements in the quality of teaching in their subjects.
- Children in the early years make good progress from their starting points. The early years outdoor provision needs further development to ensure that more children make accelerated progress in writing and mathematics.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in mathematics in key stage 2, to ensure that:
 - all teachers provide sufficient challenge to pupils in lessons, especially the most able, so that they make the progress of which they are capable
 - teachers provide pupils with a range of opportunities to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills so that a great proportion achieve the best possible outcomes in mathematics.
- Make sure that middle leaders play a full part in improving teaching and pupils' learning in the areas for which they are responsible.
- Improve the effectiveness of the early years provision so that children make faster progress, by providing more opportunities for children to develop their mathematical and writing skills in the outdoor area.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The executive headteacher and head of school lead well. Their drive to raise standards, coupled with good quality training and development for staff, has brought about rapid improvements in teaching and pupils' achievement. This ensures that the school meets its aim of 'working to make a difference to children's lives'.
- Staff are enthusiastic and reflect the energy of the senior team's determination to improve. All staff have a clear understanding of the goals the school aims to achieve and they feel supported working in the school.
- Joint observations with the school leaders by inspectors show that their judgements are accurate and feedback to teachers focuses on ways in which they can improve their teaching practices. The executive headteacher and head of school have accurately identified areas requiring further development, such as the early years outdoor area and challenge for the most able pupils in mathematics.
- Leaders are developing a curriculum that gives pupils opportunities to apply their skills in reading, writing and mathematics well. Educational visits, visitors to the school and extra-curricular activities further enhance the curriculum. Pupils describe a range of experiences they enjoy, such as the 'mathematics tetrahedron challenge', active and practical lessons and after school clubs, including those for football, pottery and drawing. Leaders acknowledge that there is more to do to develop the curriculum further across all subjects.
- A number of changes in leadership roles have happened. Recently appointed subject leaders and other middle leaders have considerable expertise in, and enthusiasm for, the areas for which they are responsible. They are not all yet wholly effective in identifying ways that teaching can be improved to make the best impact on pupils' learning.
- Leaders make effective use of pupil premium funding to provide additional support where needed, both in the classrooms and in developing pupils' emotional and social skills. Consequently, these pupils grow in confidence and make good progress.
- The additional funding to promote sport and physical education is well spent. It is used to provide professional development and training for staff and increase pupils' participation in sporting activities. The school has increased the number of clubs available, and pupil participation is high. This helps promote healthy lifestyles.
- The school is strongly committed to providing equality of opportunity, fostering good relationships and discouraging any discrimination. All pupils whatever their ability or background, have the opportunity to take part in the school's activities.
- The school promotes pupils' understanding of fundamental British values effectively. Leaders foster the principles of democracy, for example holding elections to select member of the school council. The school's key values such as respect and perseverance encourage pupils to understand and display these qualities in and around the school. Leaders make sure all pupils are valued, and mutual respect and tolerance

are strong features of the school. One pupil said, 'The teachers and pupils all respect each other's abilities.'

- The school makes good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through its strong and caring ethos. Adults are positive examples as they show empathy, respect and kindness. As a result, pupils are considerate and thoughtful. They have extremely positive relationships with adults and one another.
- Leaders and staff are active and effective in building good relationships with parents and carers. Parents express support for the school, its leaders and its work. The majority of parents would recommend the school to other parents. One parent summed up the views of many others by saying, 'I have complete trust and confidence in this school and know that the current leadership team will continue their good work for the best for the pupils.'
- The school has a good relationship with the local authority. Leaders have benefited with well-targeted support and challenge which has been particularly useful in helping support the leadership team and checking the accuracy of their judgements.

Governance of the school

- Governors are ambitious for the school. They know the strengths of the school well. They have full confidence in the leadership team to drive further improvements.
- Governors know how well the school is doing and how it compares with other schools through detailed reports from the executive headteacher and their own first-hand visits. They regularly visit classrooms and speak to subject leaders to gather evidence about the quality of teaching and learning. They ensure a clear link between pay and teachers' performance.
- Governors carefully monitor the use of additional funding, both for the pupil premium and sports grant to make sure that they improve outcomes for pupils. They are committed to promoting equality of opportunity and ensuring that there are no barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils.
- Governors understand and carry out their safeguarding duties. They check regularly to make sure systems and processes are fit for purpose. A governor meets regularly with school leaders to maintain a clear overview of safeguarding issues and provides feedback to the wider governing body.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All staff and parents who responded to the online survey agree that pupils are kept safe and are well looked after. One parent said, 'The teachers here seem to have a genuine passion for making our children the very best that they can be, not just academically but as people too.'
- Rigorous and robust systems are in place in all areas of safeguarding, and all staff understand them. There are effective relationships with other agencies to ensure that

pupils are safe and that welfare needs are met. Regular and appropriate training for staff is undertaken and is up to date.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is consistently good, and the majority of parents agree that their children are taught well. One parent said, 'I have been nothing but impressed with the level of teaching and my children's progress this year.' Teaching enables pupils to make good progress in their learning.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent and, as a result, pupils work hard, are willing to take risks and want to do well. The school has a strong learning ethos. Pupils are confident to ask if they do not understand, as they know teachers will help them.
- The teaching of phonics is effective. As a result, a solid foundation is built from which pupils can develop into confident, fluent and expressive readers. Teachers and support staff use a range of strategies to instil a love of reading which help develop their skills in reading for meaning and comprehension.
- The teaching of writing is good, and teachers develop pupils' writing skills well. For example, in a Year 3 and 4 lesson pupils wrote an imaginative opening about what it would be like to be a chick hatching out of an egg. All pupils made good progress because the teacher provided them with effective ways of developing their vocabulary and grammar.
- A positive climate for learning permeates the school. Displays of pupils' work celebrate how they apply their writing skills in a range of topics. Pupils regularly use displays on which they record, for example, their developing ideas to support their learning in literacy.
- The teaching of mathematics has improved and is providing greater challenge through the development of tasks, including reasoning and problem-solving activities. There are signs this is having a good impact on achievement. Nonetheless, there are too few opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge in a variety of ways in subjects other than in mathematics. Work in books demonstrates that pupils occasionally complete work which does not make them think hard enough about their learning.
- Where teachers' expectations are high, and they insist on the highest standards, pupils respond well. In some classes, this is not consistent and pupils need to be reminded to focus on the task in hand.
- Many teachers ask questions that encourage pupils to think and deepen their understanding. Pupils respond eagerly to these questions and are keen to contribute to class discussions. They work well individually, in pairs or groups. The challenge for the most-able is improving, but is not yet consistent across all classrooms. This is because some teachers' expectations are not high enough, especially at key stage 2.
- Teachers' comments and guidance typically make clear how pupils can improve their work. The school's marking policy is followed consistently and is helping to improve pupils' outcomes.

- Teaching assistants are effective in supporting disadvantaged pupils. Pupils with SEND are fully included in, and benefit from, all classroom activities.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are confident and articulate. All pupils feel valued, and equality of opportunity is clearly within the culture of the school. Pupils told inspectors that there is always someone to talk to if you ever have a problem.
- Pupils say they feel safe. Leaders have improved safety procedures in and around the school. For example, the pupils told inspectors about the new perimeter fence and how this keeps them safe from harm.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of the different types of bullying, saying that it is rare in their school. Pupils are knowledgeable about how to stay safe, including road safety and safety when using the internet.
- All the staff and the vast majority of parents who responded to the online survey, agree that pupils are safe and happy at school. One parent said, 'Management and class teachers are always on hand to discuss any matters about learning or well-being. Staff and management show real care and interest in each child and their family.'
- Staff work effectively with external agencies to support children and their families. They provide a highly effective care for families that require additional help.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are proud of their school, describing it as 'wonderful, kind and fabulous'. Conduct in and around the school is typically good and pupils say that they follow the school rules.
- Parents, pupils, teachers and governors believe that behaviour is good. The school's behaviour records show that behaviour is typically good over time.
- The executive headteacher and head of school have worked hard to establish a purposeful learning environment. One parent said, 'There has been a massive noticeable improvement since the new management team took over.'
- Pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities. For example, the 'Buddies' provide a high level of support for the younger children. This support helps to reinforce the school's values of 'respect' and 'kindness'.
- Pupils are eager to learn. Very occasionally, in some classes, a few pupils go off task and talk when they should be working. This tends to occur if activities are not sufficiently challenging.
- Attendance is in line with the national average for primary schools. The school is diligent and robust in its monitoring, support of, and challenge to pupils and families.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Current assessment information indicates that pupils in most year groups make good progress across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Leaders rigorously monitor the progress of all pupils and this helps them to intervene and support pupils to catch up if they fall behind.
- Pupils make good progress in the early years and by the end of the Reception Year the percentage of children who achieved a good level of development is in line with the average.
- Pupils' outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check have been at the national average for the past three years as a result of good teaching in the early years and Year 1.
- Most pupils make good progress in key stage 1, and in 2018 attained above the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2. The school provides a good level of challenge for the most able pupils in Years 1 and 2. In 2018, the proportion of pupils achieving above the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above average.
- In 2018, the proportions of pupils that attained the expected levels in reading and writing at the end of Year 6 were lower than the national figures, and mathematics attainment was well below the national average. The small numbers of pupils in Year 6 in 2018 means that each pupil's performance has a marked effect on the school's overall figures. In 2018, a fifth of Year 6 pupils had SEND, which influenced the standards reached.
- In 2018, not enough Year 6 pupils, particularly the most able, reached the higher level when they left, because they were not consistently given sufficient challenge in lessons and this slowed down their progress.
- Information kept by the school about the current pupils in Year 6 indicates that they are making better progress than in the past. The work seen during the inspection confirms this. This means that the current Year 6 pupils are better prepared for secondary school.
- The school uses pupil premium funding well to provide extra support for disadvantaged and disadvantaged most-able pupils. The small number in each year group means it is hard to make meaningful comparisons without identifying individual pupils.
- Pupils with SEND make good gains from their starting points. This is because their needs are accurately identified and the appropriate support provided for them to overcome their difficulties.
- Work in books shows that pupils deepen their understanding in a wide range of subjects. Pupils' work in areas such as history and science shows that they understand increasingly complex concepts as they move through the school.

Early years provision

Good

- Children start in the early years with skills and knowledge that are broadly typical for their age. They make good progress and achieve well.
- The quality of teaching is good. Children make good progress from their starting points and achieve a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. Teachers plan learning that interests children and systematically promotes basic skills.
- Whilst children make good progress, outcomes are not outstanding because not enough children capable of harder work exceed a good level of development.
- Teachers and other adults plan activities that capture children's interest and make them want to learn. However, only limited opportunities exist in the outside area for children to develop mathematical and writing skills. Activities in the outdoor area do not always promote effective learning.
- There are positive relationships between children and staff. The children behave well and get on with each other, learning to develop their social skills through sharing and taking turns.
- Disabled children, those with SEND, and disadvantaged children are included fully. They are well supported in their learning and so they do well.
- Parents told inspectors that communication between home and school is good. They said that their children are happy and enjoy their learning. One parent commented, 'My child is incredibly happy at school and I feel a real relationship between management, the children, staff and parents.'
- Safeguarding arrangements for the early years provision are effective. Risks are managed well and all staff are vigilant. Statutory welfare requirements are met.

School details

Unique reference number	118341
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10088032

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	155
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Marshal
Executive Headteacher	Tara Deevoy
Telephone number	01795 842344
Website	www.lower-halstow.kent.sch.uk
Email address	headteacher@lower-halstow.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	28–29 April 2015

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized primary school.
- There have been a considerable number of staff changes since the school was last inspected. The executive headteacher took up post in September 2018 and the all of the teachers joined the school within the last 18 months.
- The school is in a federation with Newington Church of England School, which is led by the executive headteacher. Each school has a head of school and both schools work closely together.
- Pupils are taught in six classes. Reception children attend full time in a single class. Years 1, 2 and 6 are taught in a single year group class. There are combined classes for Years 3 and 4, and Years 4 and 5.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.

- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above average. The proportion with education, health and care plans is in line with the average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is below average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 15 lessons. All of these were joint observations with the executive headteacher and head of school.
- The inspectors observed the school's work. They looked at a wide range of documentation, including: safeguarding documents; the school's procedures for gaining an accurate view of its performance; and pupils' work in books.
- Discussions took place with a group of pupils, as well as informal conversations with other pupils during lessons and at breaktimes. Inspectors listened to pupils read and talked to them about books that they enjoy.
- Meetings were held with school staff, three members of the governing body, parents and carers.
- Inspectors considered the 21 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors took into account four letters from parents and 66 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection team

David Harris, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Andrew Hogarth

Ofsted Inspector

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