

Ulcombe Church of England Primary School

The Street, Ulcombe, Maidstone ME17 1DU

Inspection dates	27–28 April 2016
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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The leadership of the executive headteacher has been pivotal to the success of this school. She has implemented a strong ethos of effective teaching, learning and good behaviour.
- Staff are highly motivated and share the executive headteacher's vision for the school.
- The quality of teaching is good. Teachers are accurate in assessing where a pupil is in their learning and provide work that is of the right level. As a result, pupils make strong progress from their starting points. Teaching assistants provide effective support for pupils' learning.
- The curriculum is motivating and challenging. It has been carefully designed to fit the needs of the pupils who attend this school.
- This is an inclusive school. There are effective links with harder to reach groups, particularly within the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller community. Those pupils who join the school in different year groups are given a warm and friendly welcome.
- Good relationships are a real strength throughout the school. They are central to developing the trust needed for pupils to make good progress in their personal and academic development.
- Children make good progress in the early years because of skilled leadership and effective teaching. They are well prepared for their learning in Year 1.
- Pupils report that they are proud of the school and frequently said that they 'love coming to school'.
- Parents praise the commitment of staff. They say this contributes to pupils' positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour.
- Those responsible for governance fully understand their roles. They continually look for ways to improve the school. They know the school's strengths and areas still left to improve.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well developed through the school's core.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Attendance for some Gypsy, Roma, Traveller pupils is still too low.
- Teachers do not develop pupils' skills in phonics rapidly enough.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the school makes strenuous efforts to engage with all communities in order to improve rates of attendance and hence pupils' outcomes.
- Improve the teaching of phonics so that pupils' skills develop swiftly.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Since the previous inspection the executive headteacher has had a significant positive impact throughout the school. She has been ably assisted by staff and governors. All have worked hard to create an ambitious culture where pupils learn how to make good progress and fulfil their potential.
- The school has created a curriculum that is relevant and valued by pupils. There is an impressive range of clubs and extra-curricular activities. As well as having rich experiences in English, mathematics and science, pupils also learn about commerce and money management. Pupils said how much they valued the enterprise scheme that gave them an awareness of how to make things and sell them. Pupils enjoy the practical activities that are taught, such as woodwork, gardening and sewing. The curriculum has a positive impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school is a very inclusive and harmonious community. Pupils get along and say that teachers encourage positive attitudes. Parents are very supportive of the school. Almost all would recommend the school to another parent because they consider that teachers are dedicated to helping their children. Parents are unanimous in saying that the school is a friendly and happy community. British values, such as respect, tolerance and democracy are well taught. As a result, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- There are clear arrangements for the performance management of staff. Priorities are linked to both the school and personal development targets. Those staff who have responsibility for subjects attend numerous courses to ensure that their skills are constantly improving. The executive headteacher and subject leaders regularly check work in books and visit lessons so that they have a precise understanding of the effectiveness of teaching.
- The school's own evaluation of its strengths and areas for development are accurate. Whole-school priorities for improvement are clearly identified. These are closely monitored by those who have responsibility for governance.
- Additional funding for primary sports and physical education is used very effectively. Strong links have been built with a local sports college. The school has benefited from specialist teachers in physical education. Pupils enjoy competing against other schools in sporting events. Other initiatives include a whole-school healthy lifestyle approach based on the forthcoming Olympics. As part of this theme, pupils have recently taken part in dance workshops and cooked healthy meals. These initiatives have developed pupils' understanding about the factors that have a positive impact on their health.
- The school uses additional funding effectively for the small number of disadvantaged pupils. Extra support is provided which is appropriate to each pupil's needs. This enables disadvantaged pupils to make good progress from their starting points.
- All staff are very supportive of the school. Responses to questionnaires and discussions during the inspection revealed how much they enjoy working at the school. Many stress the positive relationships between staff, pupils and parents.
- Leaders value the advice they have been given by a local authority adviser who has provided support and challenge. Regular visits have taken place to ensure that pupils make good progress. This advice has helped to improve the school rapidly since the last inspection.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance is effective because both the school governing body and the oversight board responsible for the collaboration with two other schools have a clear strategic oversight of the school. They have worked tirelessly to secure the improvements that were needed.
 - Governors carry out their duties carefully. For example, they regularly challenge the school to ensure that the expenditure of additional funds such as sports funding or pupil premium is used effectively.
 - Governors support the executive headteacher in using the school finances to best effect. One example of this is the recent employment of a part-time family liaison officer. Her role is to work with the local authority's outreach worker for Gypsy, Roma, Travellers to secure better attendance.
 - The board with oversight of the three schools is effective in setting challenging performance management targets for the executive headteacher.
 - Those responsible for governance at all levels are well aware of the strengths and the remaining areas for development for the school.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils report that they feel safe at this school. There are clear procedures to check the suitability of staff and visitors. Staff are well trained in ensuring that pupils are safeguarded and they know the procedures to follow if they have any concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching is now good. One of the main reasons that pupils make good progress is because teachers are adept at quickly assessing pupils' skills as soon as they arrive. Any gaps in learning are rapidly identified. Teachers plan carefully to set work at just the right level to enable most pupils make rapid progress.
- Occasionally, pupils join the school with skills which are well below those that are typically expected for their age. The staff team works carefully together to provide a tailored approach that best fits these pupils' needs. Evidence seen during the inspection showed that pupils with little or no previous schooling appreciated the support they received from teachers and learning support assistants. These pupils were seen to be making good and sometimes exceptional progress from their starting points.
- When asked, parents repeatedly said that the teachers in this school were dedicated to helping their children settle in. They were often delighted with the progress that their children had made.
- Teachers provide exciting opportunities for pupils to read. Many pupils said that they enjoyed completing the reading challenges that the school had set. However, teachers do not develop pupils' skills in phonics rapidly enough to ensure that all pupils make rapid progress.
- In writing, teachers have ensured that pupils understand the basic skills of punctuation and grammar. As they move through the school pupils develop the confidence to write across a range of different subjects.
- Mathematical development is much improved from the last inspection. Pupils in every class were developing their problem solving skills. Books demonstrate that pupils are skilled at developing their understanding of mathematical concepts.
- Those who are identified as being most able are well supported. For instance, they attend workshops at local grammar schools and are given additional challenging work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils thrive in a happy, caring environment because leaders have successfully created an atmosphere of trust. Relationships are positive and respectful throughout the school.
- Parents are positive about the sense of community in the school. They say that leaders and teachers are very approachable. They report how much they enjoy celebrating their child's achievements in the weekly assemblies.
- The school works hard to promote pupils' physical and emotional well-being. It liaises with a range of external agencies to ensure that the needs of pupils are met. As a result, when pupils arrive at school they are ready to learn.
- Pupils are very positive about the school. All who replied to the Ofsted questionnaire say that the school looks after their emotional and mental health well. All feel safe and secure. Almost every pupil would recommend the school to another pupil.
- Attendance overall has improved for most pupil groups since the time of the last inspection and is now close to national averages. Leaders and governors regularly review attendance. However, the attendance of the more transient group of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller pupils is still well below the national average.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- In nearly all lessons, pupils conduct themselves well and show positive attitudes to learning. They listen attentively and respond with enthusiasm to the teacher's questions.
- Pupils say that the behaviour of others is good. In the playground they get along well together irrespective of culture or background.
- Pupils told the inspector that bullying of any kind is rare and this is confirmed in the school's records.

- Parents agree that the pupils at this school are well behaved.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils make good progress from often low starting points. Most pupils are transient, some have only been at the school for a short time and others have had inconsistent attendance. Some pupils arrive with almost no previous schooling. Because of this, published data on attainment at the end of both key stages 1 and 2 is lower than the national average.
- Pupils enter the school in all year groups and frequently need to catch up in their learning. Teachers and learning support assistants help them by providing carefully tailored work that meets their needs. This gives them the skills to make good and occasionally exceptional progress.
- The progress of the very few pupils who have attended the school since Reception is strong. At the end of key stage 2, these pupils typically attain above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Those pupils whose attendance is very sporadic make inconsistent progress. This is because their learning is regularly interrupted. They have to spend time when back in school consolidating their existing skills before they can move on.
- The few pupils who have special educational needs or disability typically make similar progress to their peers. This is because learning support assistants are skilled at adapting to meet each pupil's individual needs.
- The few disadvantaged pupils in the school typically make good progress. At the end of key stage 2 in 2015, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils exceeding expected progress was similar to other pupils nationally. This is because the executive headteacher and subject leaders diligently track their progress. Effective strategies are put in place to ensure that these pupils are given every chance to do well.
- The most-able pupils usually make at least the progress expected of them. They are well challenged in most, but not all, lessons. Recent success for the most able at this school has included passing the challenging entrance examinations to grammar school.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Early years provision

is good

- Children start in the early years with skills and knowledge that are below those typically expected for their age, particularly in speaking and listening. Due to effective leadership and good teaching, the proportion of children who reach a good level of development at the end of Reception is often higher than the national average. As a result, children are well prepared for their learning in Year 1.
- Teachers carefully develop children's skills. For example, the play house that is set up as a kitchen encourages children to develop their speaking and listening skills.
- Lessons are usually characterised by the class teacher and support assistants helping children to think deeply. As a result, they make good progress in most of the areas of learning. However children's phonics skills are less well developed.
- The provision is well led and managed. Additional funding for disadvantaged children is well used to narrow any gaps in learning. Activities are planned to stimulate and motivate children. For example, during the inspection children were planting and growing their own vegetables. Many showed delight at how their own seedling was growing. They displayed a good understanding that plants need heat, light and water to flourish. Leaders carefully track the progress that children are making. They plan lessons to enable learning to move forward rapidly.
- Children's behaviour in the early years is good. This is because adults have high expectations and clear, well-established routines are in place. There are effective links with a range of external agencies. Children's achievements are warmly welcomed by everyone. Parents appreciate the frequent opportunities they have to talk with teachers about their child's progress. They say that their children feel happy and safe.

School details

Unique reference number	118631
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10002355

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	98
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Hoadly
Executive headteacher	Emma Hickling
Telephone number	01622 842903
Website	ulcombe.kent.sch.uk
Email address	office@ulcombe.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–12 December 2013

Information about this school

- Ulcombe Church of England Primary is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Most of the pupils come from Gypsy, Roma, Traveller backgrounds. Of these 60% are from a transient population of Gypsy, Roma, Travellers and 40% are from a more settled community who travel less frequently. The percentage of pupils from the transient community is increasing each year and is much larger than at the time of the previous inspection.
- There are very high numbers of pupils who enter and leave the school at different times of the year. In the two weeks prior to the inspection, eight pupils left and twelve joined the school. There are very few pupils who have been at the school since Reception. The amount of time pupils are at the school varies considerably. Quite a few pupils go travelling and then return to the school several months later. Many do not attend other schools during the months that they are away. The school keeps the books of all pupils who have left so that when they return pupils can pick up their learning where they left off. Sometimes pupils enter the school in the later year groups with no previous schooling.
- The school works in partnership with a range of agencies, including the outreach worker for Gypsy, Roma, Travellers and a schools liaison officer. The school has recently employed a part-time family liaison officer.
- The school is part of a collaboration of three small schools, all of which have the same executive headteacher. Staff train together and moderate the quality of work across the schools.
- Each school in the collaboration has its own governing body. Further strategic oversight is provided by a board responsible for the three schools. Part of the board's responsibilities include the performance management of the executive headteacher.
- Children are taught in mixed-age classes. In the early years foundation stage children are taught in one full-time Reception class with some Year 1 pupils. There are three other classes in the school.

- The proportion of pupils currently supported by the pupil premium is much lower than that found in most schools. Pupil premium is additional funding provided by the government for those pupils eligible for free school meals in the last six years, pupils who have been looked-after continuously for one day or more and those pupils who have been adopted from care.
- When compared to national figures, the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is much lower to the national average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in all classes. There were 10 lessons and part lessons visited, most of which were observed jointly with the executive headteacher.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils and the inspector looked at work in books and listened to some pupils reading. The 39 responses to the online pupil questionnaire were considered. There were also informal discussions with pupils at breaktime regarding what it was like to be a pupil at this school.
- The inspector took account of 10 responses to the Ofsted online Parent View questionnaire and also spoke to parents at the end of the school day.
- The views expressed by members of staff in 16 online questionnaires were considered.
- The inspector looked at a range of documentation and policies including the school improvement plan. Information about the performance of the school in comparison with other schools nationally was considered along with documents about pupils' current attainment and progress. Documents checking the quality of teaching and learning and records relating to behaviour, attendance, child protection and safeguarding were also examined.

Inspection team

Liz Bowes, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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