

Lower Halstow Primary School

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

Inspection dates 28–29 April 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The executive headteacher, together with the acting head of school, has successfully put the school on a firm footing by generating a clear vision for raising standards.
- Pupils are making good progress overall. From their starting points, pupils make outstanding progress in writing.
- Most teaching is good and some of it is outstanding. This consistently good picture is the key reason for pupils' good and improving progress.
- The school curriculum is skilfully organised to provide a wide range of subjects and activities. It motivates both boys and girls, and sustains their strong commitment to learning.
- Children develop self-esteem and enthusiasm for learning in the early years. They make very good progress in developing social and emotional skills and enjoy school routines.
- Lower Halstow is a very caring and nurturing school in which pupils thrive.
- The vast majority of parents agree that their child is happy at the school. Parents say that their children receive a 'good level of education' and enjoy coming to school.
- Pupils' behaviour is impeccable. They are polite and friendly. Pupils arrive cheerfully at the start of the day as they enter their classrooms. They are eager and enthusiastic learners.
- Pupils say they 'feel 100% safe'. This view is supported unanimously by all parents and staff.
- Leaders and managers, together with governors, are fully committed to providing a high standard of education for all pupils. Their actions have a direct impact on the rapidly improving quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding. As a result, too few pupils make outstanding progress in reading and mathematics compared to writing.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching in eight lessons, all of which were visited jointly with either the executive headteacher or the acting head of school.
- Discussions were held with pupils, the senior leaders of both schools in the federation, subject leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. In addition, the inspector looked at pupils' work in books and listened to them read.
- The inspector met informally with parents at the beginning of the school day and took account of the 23 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). The responses to 20 staff questionnaires were also considered.
- A number of documents were viewed, including the school's information about pupils' progress and the school's evaluation of its work. The inspector scrutinised checks on teachers' effectiveness, reports from the local authority and records relating to attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Gay Whent, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The school is in a federation with Newington Church of England Primary School. The headteacher is executive headteacher of both schools. The two schools work closely together.
- There has been a high turnover of staff since the last inspection. Staffing from September 2014 has been more stable.
- Pupils are taught in six classes. Years 1 and 2 are taught in a single year group class. There are combined classes for Years 3 and 4, Years 4 and 5, and Years 5 and 6. Reception children attend full time in a single class.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language. A growing number of pupils are of Romany or Gypsy heritage.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is higher than the national average. This group of pupils has a variety of barriers to learning which are mostly related to speech, language and communication needs.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after) is lower than the national average.
- The school is part of the Gateway Alliance, a group of 14 local primary schools.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to typically outstanding in order to ensure that more pupils across the school make better than expected progress by giving pupils more opportunities to practise and develop their reading and mathematics skills in order to accelerate their learning.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The executive headteacher, together with the acting head of school, is passionate about the school and leads a rigorous drive towards high standards of learning. Together, they share a very strong sense of purpose. Their determined leadership is at the core of the school's success. They have created a culture in which good teaching and good behaviour flourish, and which is having a marked impact on raising standards.
- Parents say that the school is 'brilliant'. Everybody in the school shares responsibility for fostering good relationships. Working parents say that they greatly appreciate the fact that they can drop off their children to their classrooms from 8.30am. All staff unanimously agree that the school is well led and managed. They say, typically, that they are 'really proud to be a member of the school' and 'are all involved in the school's vision'.
- Senior leaders have designed a school improvement plan which is sharply focused on the use of precise goals, milestones and success measures. These measures are used to check the impact of actions that the school takes. Careful tracking of pupils' progress ensures that effective support is provided more quickly for any pupil at risk of falling behind.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements. Policies are detailed and fully in place. Leaders at all levels, together with all staff in the school, ensure that pupils are kept as safe as possible. A higher number of designated officers than is usual, as well as governors, are appropriately trained. Governors are vigorous in monitoring school policies and procedures.
- Leaders rigorously manage teachers' performance management. They provide teachers with constructive feedback which enables them to recognise what they do well. Teachers use their 'next steps' to ensure pupils make even better progress. Consequently, the quality of teaching is now good. All teachers agree that they have been well supported by the professional development training opportunities organised through the Gateway Alliance.
- Equal opportunities are promoted well and any potential for discrimination is addressed proactively. This vision is shared across the whole school community. As a result, those pupils from a diverse range of backgrounds, including those who are of Romany or Gypsy heritages, get on well together and make good progress.
- The school makes good use of pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Thanks to the tailored support that they receive, these pupils make rapid progress and are achieving as well as, if not better than, their peers.
- The leadership of the provision for those who are disabled or have special educational needs is effective. The leader has a very clear understanding of what is working well and also the specific priorities of individual pupils. Strong links have been made with their parents and a 'working together' approach is showing benefits in terms of pupils' progress. The whole of the school community is involved in making a positive difference. Subsequently, school staff, together with the caretaker, have attended specific training to enable pupils with specific learning challenges to participate fully in the life of the school.
- The curriculum supports pupils' moral, social, spiritual and cultural development well. Pupils benefit from planned opportunities throughout the year to go on visits which support and enhance good learning. Pupils in Year 5 actively engaged in cycling training during the inspection, and were not put off by a heavy downpour of rain. Displays in classrooms and around the school link very well to current learning, particularly in pupils' writing, mathematics and sport. During the inspection, older pupils were seen developing their knowledge and understanding of democracy. They prepared their vision for the future and the things that they would like to see changed in their local area. This led them into creating policies as part of their 'manifesto' and reinforced the power of persuasive writing in readiness for their mock election day on May 7.
- The school is using and monitoring the impact of the primary school physical education and sport funding to ensure a higher participation in sport across the school. The funding is also being used to enable pupils to develop healthier lifestyles. There is a strong emphasis on sport and 'being the best you can be', endorsed effectively by three Olympic athletes who have visited the school since 2012. They willingly share their abilities with pupils and staff, participating in lessons and leading assemblies. Pupils were captivated when watching an Olympic athlete as he demonstrated carefully executed back flips, an important part of his award-winning swimming dives.
- Subject leaders have a good impact on progress in their subjects. They have a very clear understanding of what they need to do to improve further and have set their actions out in plans which senior leaders monitor and evaluate regularly.

- The local authority has provided useful and constructive support and guidance to the school since the last inspection. This has been instrumental in helping improvement.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors know the school well. Governance is strong and well organised across the two schools in the federation. Governors are clear about their roles and responsibilities. They ensure that development plans remain sharply focused on pupils' achievement.
- Governors challenge the school in terms of its achievement, attendance and the quality of teaching. They have high expectations that attainment and progress continue to improve. They are able to do this well as a result of the clear presentation of school data which they receive on a six weekly basis so that they can effectively hold the school to account.
- Governors are well trained. They carry out annual data training with staff so that everyone understands the school's performance compared with other schools nationally.
- Governors ensure that teachers' pay is linked to their performance. They set challenging targets for the executive headteacher and ensure that the same is true for all other teachers in the school. They are aware of what is being done to reward good teaching and how underperformance is tackled.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. This is clearly visible from the time they arrive at school in the morning and continues throughout the school day.
- Pupils are polite, friendly and helpful. Older pupils who take special care of Reception children in September when they start school continue to include them in their lunchtime games throughout the school year.
- All pupils enjoy assemblies, lunchtime and playtimes, and willingly welcome visitors. Their behaviour in assemblies is impeccable. They sing together confidently and well, regardless of their age or ability.
- Pupils arrive in their classes punctually and ready to learn. They settle to their work quickly and without any fuss. There are no interruptions because all pupils want to learn. They constantly strive to do their best. In every classroom, and at all times of the school day, the atmosphere in lessons is calm and purposeful.
- The presentation of written work is immaculate. Pupils take pride in ensuring correct spelling, punctuation and grammar, using the learning walls in their classrooms to help them. They regularly review their work as shown by their 'red pen comments', and use the 'early morning time' to respond to the improvements recommended by their teacher.
- Pupils are keen to play their part in the leadership of the school. They have an active school council. The school librarians are keen to play their part, and take responsibility for making sure the school library is ready for other pupils to use at any time.
- Pupils say that their teachers are 'awesome', adding that 'they are always kind and always helpful'. They speak very positively about every aspect of school life and would not change anything at all about the school.
- The fact that pupils like coming to school is seen in their above average attendance. During the second day of the inspection, almost every pupil was present in the school.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Appointments to the school staff comply with safer recruitment procedures. Risk assessments of all activities are rigorous. The staggered start to the school day ensures that dropping off time is much safer for both children and their parents arriving at school.
- Pupils say that they feel completely safe in the school. Their parents and all staff agree. Nearly all parents agree that their child is well looked after at the school. Many parents say that they value the support of the family liaison officer.
- Incidents of any form of bullying or unkind behaviour are extremely rare. A very high number of parents agree that the school deals effectively with any bullying. Older pupils say that there is no bullying at the school. Pupils know exactly what to do if any bullying should occur, and that they can approach any adult in the school should they have any concerns.

The quality of teaching**is good**

- The school's focus on improving the quality of teaching across the school has resulted in teaching which is consistently good. Some teaching is outstanding. Achievement in pupils' reading and mathematics has improved well as a result. In some year groups pupils make outstanding progress, but it is not yet consistently outstanding in all year groups across the school.
- Pupils have clearly made outstanding improvements in their writing. Pupils' books show that they are given many opportunities to practise writing in all sorts of different ways every day. Many pupils have already filled two large books with their writing so far this term. It is clearly evident that both boys and girls enjoy writing. This is seen, for example, in elegant descriptions of a picture in Year 2, with pupils writing: 'The sun is dancing through the leaves ... I heard mysterious voices The trees waved at me for a warning. They are gargantuan sky scrapers.' Attractive displays, full of words which challenge and stimulate learning, are found in classrooms across the school. Pupils actively use these as resources for new ideas and as reminders during their lessons.
- Key subject leaders provide outstanding role models for teachers at the start of their teaching career. These exemplars also contribute strongly to teachers quickly developing the key skills to impact on learning across all subjects, particularly in literacy, reading and mathematics.
- Teachers make good use of the staggered start in the morning to enable pupils to begin their day able to focus and concentrate from the beginning. Teachers set high expectations, particularly of pupils' behaviour. This ensures that a calm, purposeful working environment continues for the whole of the school day.
- Pupils readily share information with adults or with their peers. They select their individual challenge before embarking on their work. As a result of clear explanations, well-prepared resources and a revision of what they already know, pupils are able to embark on their learning activity straightaway. They rise to the challenge of a 'tricky question' and are willing to have a go without any fear of failure. Adults continually question pupils' understanding and encourage them to use the correct mathematical vocabulary in their explanations. As a result, many pupils make exceptionally good progress.
- In every lesson, teaching assistants are deployed well by the teachers and make valuable contributions to pupils' learning. They support disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs effectively and ensure that they are included fully in all activities.
- As a result of a whole-school focus, pupils are developing a real love for reading. The enthusiasm of teachers motivates pupils in their learning.
- In all their books, teachers' marking shows pupils clearly their next steps in learning. Where these are carefully planned, pupils make outstanding progress, as in writing. Teachers, together with their teaching assistants, share the marking of pupils' books. In mathematics books, questions are posed to extend both thinking and reasoning. For example, a teaching assistant in Year 3 challenged a pupil who had already achieved the success criteria for an activity: 'Can I make 39p out of three coins?' A reply clearly explained: 'I cannot do this because there is not a 9p coin.'

The achievement of pupils**is good**

- As a direct result of accurate and honest self-evaluation, pupils' progress is improving. In some year groups, progress is outstanding.
- Six-weekly pupil progress meetings, together with careful monitoring of pupils' performance, enable teachers and leaders to identify any pupils who may be falling behind. The school provides support through one-to-one and small-group teaching activities as needed. School leaders explore imaginative and unusual ways for pupils whose progress has been slow. Focused groups of pupils are making good progress in their reading as a result of applying rhythm sharply and systematically. They participate in the activities with enjoyment, and as the lesson proceeds their confidence and understanding grows visibly.
- School leaders focus on the achievement of all groups of learners. They work closely with the families of pupils of Romany or Gypsy heritage, building good relationships with them. These are then developed positively to enable the pupils to make good and better progress by the time they leave the school in their reading, writing and mathematics.
- The needs of the most-able pupils are met well; they make very fast progress in reading and mathematics. This is due to the effective opportunities which teachers provide for them to practise and refine their skills. This year, leaders are expecting higher standards from the most able in writing because some pupils are already working some years ahead of what is expected for their age.
- Disadvantaged pupils are taught very effectively. As a result of a whole-school focus on improving the provision for disadvantaged pupils, the school's current information shows that they are making much

faster progress than their peers. Any gaps between their attainment and that of other pupils nationally are closing rapidly or are non-existent. In the national tests in 2014, there was a gap of a term in writing and about three terms in reading and mathematics at the end of Year 6 when comparing disadvantaged pupils with other pupils in their year group and with other pupils nationally.

- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress over time. This is because tracking data and work in lessons are used effectively to check on how well they are learning and to plan their future learning needs. The school is putting into place additional programmes to support them academically which are having a positive impact on their learning.
- Reading is a priority for improvement and has a high focus in the school. Pupils have created their own reading area in each classroom. Pupils' interests are now reflected in the range of books in each class. The school library is a bright and attractive feature of the school. Parents create interesting displays which encourage more pupils to look and read, highlighting reading as an important skill for all.
- Published test information does not appear to support the judgement that pupils' achievement is good overall. However, the school's assessments are checked rigorously and teaching is securely good. This view matches the findings of Her Majesty's Inspector who carried out the follow-up visits since the last inspection.

The early years provision

is good

- Children start at the school with skills and abilities that are typical for their age. They make good progress so that the proportion of children reaching a good stage of development exceeds the national average. All children make very good progress in their social and emotional development. This is helped by the opportunities they have to be part of the whole school. From the beginning of the school day, they share with all the older pupils in assemblies, at playtime, and during lunchtime in the dining hall. The school offers a very safe start to school life by linking the youngest children to a Year 6 'buddy'. All children are well prepared for the next stage of their education in Year 1.
- Routines are established quickly. Many of the youngest children take advantage of the opportunity to arrive at school when classroom doors open at 8.30am. They know what to do, and quietly and quickly choose an activity, or sit with a book and a friend in their classroom.
- The teaching areas provide stimulating environments for learning. Planned and free-choice activities are linked to things children like to do. The activities lead to interesting and creative ways to learn and explore, as in the castle role-play area. Here children write to their heart's content in a quiet corner surrounded by pictures, and learn many advanced words such as 'banquet' and 'palace'. Outside, children investigate the power of magnets and are led to deeper exploration by the probing questions of a teaching assistant. Opportunities to count and order numbers outside range from number-line ordering on a washing line and playing a game with extra-large, numbered dice, to searching for hidden numbers in a pink sticky mixture.
- The teacher and her teaching assistants take special care to engage all families with their children's learning. Parents appreciate the contact they have with the school and are very complimentary about the way they are informed about their children's progress.
- Teaching is good. Checks on children's progress are rigorous and staff have a clear knowledge of individual children and their needs. Children concentrate and do their best. Activities are carefully tailored to children's learning needs so that the children enjoy writing both inside and outside. A large group of boys opted to write a postcard to the sports athlete who showed them 'amazing back flips in the hall yesterday'.
- Children play happily and extremely well together, both in class and outside. They are well aware of the importance of routines. Behaviour is excellent. Children are very safe in their environment owing to the vigilant approach by all staff.
- Leadership and management of the early years are good. They are not yet outstanding as children do not make consistently high rates of progress in relation to their starting points.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	118341
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	462397

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	143
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Marshall
Headteacher	Cathy Walker
Date of previous school inspection	16–17 May 2013
Telephone number	01795 842344
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