

Horsmonden Primary School

Back Lane, Horsmonden, Kent TN12 8NJ

Inspection dates

7–8 July 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 effective headteacher has united the staff team. Everyone at Horsmonden now works towards the same set of shared values in order to achieve the very best for pupils.
- Senior leaders have successfully improved the quality of teaching. As a result, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are rising steadily across the school.
- Governors are aspirational. They regularly check how well the school is progressing towards its goals, and challenge senior leaders to make further improvements. This is a strong factor in the school's success.
- The majority of lessons engage pupils fully because teachers ensure that tasks are relevant and exciting. As a result, pupils behave extremely well.
- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils develop into self assured learners who contribute strongly to the school and wider community.
- Children get off to good start in the early years. They enjoy learning and achieve well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Changes in staffing mean that leadership of foundation subjects is underdeveloped since the school was last inspected. More work is needed to ensure that plans to progress pupils' skills are firmly in place.
- Teaching is not routinely challenging enough over time so that pupils, including the most able, make more than expected progress.
- Pupils do not fully appreciate the range of different cultures beyond the immediate locality – limiting their cultural development.
- A minority of pupils are persistently absent or late to school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop leadership of the foundation subjects so that it is as effective as the leadership of English and mathematics.
- Ensure that teaching consistently provides the right level of challenge so that pupils, over time, achieve their very best.
- Increase the proportion of pupils who attend school regularly and on time.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding of the range of heritages and cultures in modern Britain.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Since her appointment, the dedicated headteacher, supported effectively by senior leaders, has worked unremittingly to improve the school. She has skilfully created a strong team where everyone focuses steadily on achieving the school's agreed vision and values.
- Senior leaders carry out careful checks on lessons and pupils' books, providing useful pointers to develop teachers' work. Teachers' targets are sensibly linked to the school's improvement plan, ensuring that everyone concentrates on the same important issues. In addition, teachers visit other schools to see what could be achieved and bring back new ideas to freshen provision at Horsmonden. As a result of these endeavours, the majority of teaching over time is now good, and some is outstanding.
- Several changes to personnel have held back development of middle level leaders. The headteacher rightly ensured secure leadership of English and mathematics, to raise standards in these subjects. For example, the mathematics leader provided training in mastery of mathematics, helping teachers to offer work of greater challenge and depth to challenge the most able pupils in particular. Pupils are keen to enter the regular mathematics challenges, which have raised the profile of mathematics across the school.
- The English leader has worked alongside specific staff to improve reading, and has raised teachers' expectations of pupils' handwriting and presentation. The phonics (letters and the sounds they make) leader regularly checks pupils' progress to make sure they are on track with the new system to teach letters and sounds. There is swift action if any pupil falls behind and consequently standards in phonics have risen this year.
- Now that the staff team is more settled, development of the foundation subjects is underway. Foundation subject leaders are all part of the newly-formed 'creativity group', ably led by the assistant headteacher. The group has a well-considered action plan to ensure that teachers are confident in all subjects and that schemes of work include a useful progression of skills. However, this work is at a very early stage. Leaders acknowledge that more needs to be done to ensure that foundation subjects are led as effectively as English and mathematics.
- The curriculum offers an exciting range of activities to engage and motivate pupils. Teachers choose stimulating texts such as 'The Iron Man' or organise events such as 'Roman Day', which fire pupils' imagination and motivate them to learn. The wide range of extra-curricular activities changes across the year, providing opportunities to develop interests such as gardening or cookery. A high proportion of pupils also take up the offer to play an instrument and all pupils in Year 4 learn the cello. Pupils contribute to village life too, for example singing to the elderly at Christmas. Parents appreciate all these opportunities, which contribute to their children's enjoyment of school.
- The school effectively promotes reading for pleasure. The library, now situated at the heart of school, is a focal point for pupils to enjoy books. Here, visits from 'Dave the rabbit' encourage pupils to practise reading aloud, 'to try to make him calm and happy'. Each classroom has an attractive book corner to entice pupils to read, while events such as National Book Day are celebrated with gusto. One pupil said, 'We really like reading and it's quite relaxing'.
- Pupils have a good understanding of British values, clearly explaining the need for respect and how democracy works in action. They have a strong grasp of right and wrong, and the school's buddy system helps older pupils learn to take care of younger children. Pupils widen their knowledge and develop empathy by exploring different faiths and lifestyles. For example, Year 5 pupils thoughtfully reflected on the contrasts between rich and poor in Brazil. However, pupils have less in-depth knowledge of different cultures in modern Britain beyond the school's locality.
- The pupil premium funding, additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils, is used well. Additional resources and interventions are provided to support these pupils' emotional, social and academic needs effectively, so that they make progress at least in line with their peers.
- Leaders also make good use of sports premium funding. There is a carefully-thought-out strategy to develop teachers' skills and confidence to teach physical education. In addition, an increased involvement in inter-school competitions, together with the wider range of sports clubs on offer, encourages pupils to be more active.
- The local authority provides helpful support, such as developing learning in the early years or providing useful training. Teachers also work with other schools to agree judgements on pupils' work. Leaders sensibly embrace all these opportunities, which help the school to improve.

- Parents all agree that pupils are kept safe and secure at school. There is robust external and internal site security, and visitors are carefully signed in, ensuring no unannounced strangers gain access to the premises.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance is strong and effective. Governors wisely audit their skills and recruit new members accordingly, thus ensuring there is the right balance of useful experience. They sensibly consider succession planning to maintain momentum should any of the governors change.
 - Governors carry out planned visits to see the school in action, which helps them check progress towards the school's goals. However, they are always mindful to separate their strategic role from the operational work of school leaders.
 - Governors provide a robust level of challenge to school leaders, asking probing questions to help them understand exactly how well the school is doing. They allocate funding carefully to ensure every penny provides value for money, including pupil premium and sports funding. When considering teachers' pay, governors ensure that any progression is linked to good performance. Governors communicate effectively with parents. For example, they recently held an information session to update everyone on their vision and plans for Horsmonden, so that there is a shared understanding of the school's direction.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Documentation to check adults' suitability to work with children is fully in place. Staff all understand their responsibilities regarding child protection and preventing extremism, because they have undertaken recent training. Consequently, they are vigilant about their pupils. Health and safety policies and procedures are rigorously adhered to, including provision of suitably trained first aiders. Any concerns about pupils' well-being are carefully logged. On these occasions, leaders work well with parents and follow issues up with the right agencies to ensure that pupils get the support they need.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The vast majority of teachers plan sequences of lessons carefully over time, building effectively on pupils' prior learning to set work at the right level of difficulty for their pupils. The most able pupils explained that tasks include opportunities for them to tackle harder work, so they remain fully engaged. Pupils are very motivated learners because teachers make work interesting and relevant to real life. They concentrate hard and push themselves to do their best. As a result they make the progress they should. However, occasionally there is insufficient challenge for some pupils and at these times learning slows.
- Across the school, teachers establish good routines and set high expectations for good behaviour. Consequently, lessons are calm and pupils learn without interruption. On the rare occasions when pupils lose focus, teachers quickly get them back on track. The atmosphere of trust and respect means pupils are confident to contribute their ideas, and are not afraid to make mistakes.
- Teachers nearly always demonstrate tasks clearly so pupils can quickly get on with their learning. The success criteria for each task are also explained well. This helps pupils know what they are aiming for. The helpful prompts in classrooms support learners effectively. For example, one Year 2 pupil explained, 'Sometimes I forget my letters and sounds so I look on the phonics wall and that helps me'. Displays of good-quality work on classroom walls also remind pupils what they are capable of and encourage them to set their sights high.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported through interventions such as 'success at arithmetic', which help them make the progress they should. Weekly sessions from an art therapist provide helpful support for some pupils' emotional well-being so they are ready to learn.
- Teachers apply the school policy by providing detailed advice to support pupils to improve their work. Pupils say that marking is helpful because it 'highlights what you need to do'. Their books show that pupils usually respond promptly to their teachers' comments, although teachers do not consistently check they have done so. Pupils often incorporate suggested improvements in later pieces of work, helping them to make good progress.
- Teaching assistants have received valuable training, especially for letters and sounds, so that they provide effective support for learners. They are well prepared for lessons and their good knowledge of each pupil allows them to target their useful help according to need. Along with teachers, they provide positive role models for the school's values.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils at Horsmonden are taught to understand and act on the school's values to help them become effective learners and active citizens. They display outstanding attitudes to learning, are keen to challenge themselves further and also in supporting their peers to do as well as possible. They are proud of their achievements. For example, one Year 4 pupil when tackling mathematics problems excitedly told his teacher, 'I've done a tricky one!'
- The school ensures that pupils develop confidence and self-belief. Pupils know their views are taken into account at the school council. Everyone can also have their say at the mixed-age children's voice assemblies, where older pupils skilfully lead debates on topics such as 'What went well this year?' All pupils listen carefully, showing a high level of respect for others' views.
- Parents say their children feel safe at school. Pupils in Year 6 look out for their younger buddies, a system that one Reception parent described as 'terrific.' Governors have checked that pupils know how to report any concerns and pupils note that they can 'text' their teacher by writing a message on a 'mobile phone'. Pupils have a good awareness of a range of issues such as road safety and keeping safe online. They are taught about different types of bullying, including cyber bullying, and know what to do should this occur. However, pupils are adamant that there is currently no bullying in the school.
- Pupils learn about healthy eating and have a good understanding of the importance of exercise, shown by the high rate of participation in sports clubs.
- Pupils think carefully about others and are proactive in offering practical help both in school and in the local area. For example, they keenly fundraise for a range of charities, and participate in village events such as a weekend litter pick. Older pupils relish opportunities to take on duties such as library monitor or answering the phone at lunchtimes. All this helps them develop responsibility and learn to be reliable members of the community.
- Overall, Horsmonden pupils certainly demonstrate the qualities of 'happiness, kindness and success' to which the school aspires.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Adults use the school's behaviour system consistently to reward good behaviour. Pupils are keen to earn 'dojos' for positive attitudes or golden tickets for demonstrating the school's values. As a result, behaviour in lessons is excellent, and low-level disruption is very rare. This allows pupils to concentrate on their work. Pupils move sensibly and quietly around the school and are notably courteous and friendly to their peers and adults. Their exceptional manners extend outside of school. One parent commented, 'You can spot a Horsmonden child within the village, they are the ones holding doors open or talking politely with the older villagers.'
- At playtimes, pupils also behave very well, supported by the variety of activities on offer. They say that the playground is a friendly place and 'there is always someone to be with'. If anyone does fall out, adults help them sort out their differences and 'everyone always gets back together'.
- Overall, attendance is broadly in line with the national average. Although the school offers them appropriate support, a minority of families continue to find regular attendance and good punctuality a challenge.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- In Year 2, standards at the end of 2015 improved considerably. Pupils attained significantly above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of pupils in the higher band for attainment was also above the national average.
- The school's information shows that the vast majority of pupils currently in Year 1 and Year 2, including the most able, make good progress from their different starting points in reading and mathematics. As a result, most pupils reach the standard expected for their age by the end of Year 2, and many do better.
- Standards in writing in 2016 were slightly lower at the end of Year 2, because boys attained less well than girls. Leaders have robust plans for the current Year 2 class, to help boys make faster progress in writing to catch up with the girls. Boys in the current Year 1 class were also behind in their writing at the end of their Reception Year. They have caught up well with the girls in their class and are now at the expected standard for their age.

- The proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check fell just below the national average in 2015. However, all Year 2 pupils who were below the expected standard in Year 1 caught up with where they should be. In 2016, a new approach to teaching phonics has paid off. Sessions are well organised and planned to meet pupils' needs. As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard rose to above the 2015 national level. Pupils who read to inspectors showed a good grasp of phonics, using their knowledge effectively to tackle unknown or tricky words.
- In Year 6, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics has shown steady improvement over the past three years. By the end of 2015, standards were in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils making expected or better progress in reading, writing and mathematics was in line with or better than the national average.
- Teachers' assessments indicate the majority of pupils currently in key stage 2 make good or better progress from their different starting points in reading, writing and mathematics, reaching the standards expected for their age. National curriculum test results for Year 6 pupils in 2016 are above the national average in reading and writing. Leaders are disappointed by the lower test results in mathematics, where several pupils missed attaining the expected score by only one or two marks.
- There are only a very small number of disadvantaged pupils in each year group, making it hard to analyse trends as attainment varies from year to year. However, the school's information for current pupils across the school indicates that the vast majority make at least expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics from their starting points, and some pupils make faster progress. As a result, the majority reach the standard expected for their age.
- There is good provision for the most able pupils across the school. Pupils' books and school information indicate that these pupils make the progress they should in English and mathematics, to deepen their learning. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress from their starting points, to meet their targets.

Early years provision

is good

- By the end of the Reception Year in both 2014 and 2015, standards were above the national average. However, boys did not achieve as well as girls, especially in writing. Standards rose further in 2016, when a very high proportion of children achieved a good level of development, and many exceeded expectations. Teachers also successfully improved standards for boys in writing. Children in the early years all make good progress from their different starting points so that they are well prepared for Year 1.
- Children get off to a good start because teachers find out from kindergarten and home visits how well they are doing and what their interests are. This helps teachers plan suitable activities to engage the children from day one.
- Parents are invited to contribute to assessments of their child throughout the year, by completing 'speech bubbles' to highlight achievements at home. There are weekly book sharing sessions when parents are invited into school and also an open door policy. Consequently, there is good communication between school and home, meaning parents are well informed about their child's progress.
- The lively indoor and outdoor learning environments promote children's curiosity and imagination across all areas of the curriculum. Children enjoy the range of activities on offer, many of which relate to real life situations. For example, they learn to handle coins when paying for services at the hairdressing salon, and their seaside topic motivates them to write postcards home. These meaningful tasks encourage them to develop good skills in literacy and numeracy.
- Teachers skilfully tailor the weekly challenges so that all children, including the most able, remain fully engaged. Children said they enjoy coming to school.
- Children are kept safe in school. Adults are well trained in important matters such as safeguarding and first aid, and boundaries are secure. Children learn to be responsible. For example, a briefing from the school caretaker showed them the importance of safety. This helped them use simple tools successfully, under careful supervision. Children also learn the importance of school values from the good role models provided by their older buddies.

School details

Unique reference number	118276
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10009209

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

Type of school	All-through primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	211
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bob Sherwood
Headteacher	Tracy Thomas
Telephone number	01892 722529
Website	www.horsmonden.kent.sch.uk
Email address	theoffice@horsmonden.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 March 2014

Information about this school

- Horsmonden is smaller than the average primary school.
- A new headteacher started at the school in September 2014.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, for which the school receives additional funding (pupil premium), is below average.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A very small proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is lower than the national average.
- Children attend the Reception class full time.
- The school offers daily before- and after-school clubs. These are managed by the governing body and were reviewed as part of this inspection.
- The school meets the current government floor standards.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all classes at least once, accompanied by senior leaders. Inspectors heard pupils read and looked at pupils' work in their books and on display.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and other leaders; six governors, including the chair of the governing body; a group of staff and a representative from Kent local authority.
- Inspectors met two groups of pupils, observed playtime and assembly, visited the school's before- and after-school clubs, and spoke informally to pupils around the school.
- Inspectors spoke to parents at the end of the day, and analysed the 58 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also considered 16 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- A range of documents was examined including the school's improvement plans and self evaluation, documents on the school's website, governing body records and reports from Kent local authority.
- Checks were made of arrangements for keeping pupils safe and records of pupils' attendance and behaviour. Inspectors scrutinised leaders' analysis of pupils' progress and records of the quality of teaching.

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