

Somers Heath Primary School

Foyle Drive, South Ockenden Essex RM15 5LX

Inspection dates	23–24 February 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

- Pupils at Somers Heath enjoy their time at school enormously. They make very good progress as a result of effective teaching and care.
- The headteacher brings a calm, kind authority to his leadership of the school. As a result, the school is a harmonious and pleasant environment that is valued greatly by pupils and staff.
- Teachers plan very effective lessons that are well matched to the needs of pupils. They place a strong emphasis upon developing effective communication skills and the importance of good presentation.
- Outcomes for pupils have improved substantially in recent years. Pupils make better than average progress from their different starting points in all subjects, especially mathematics and writing.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs make similarly good progress because they are effectively taught and receive good additional support where needed.
- Pupils behave very well and are supportive of each other. Disruption to learning is very rare and is dealt with effectively. Children play together happily and safely in well-supervised, stimulating outdoor areas.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children are well cared for and make good progress. Teachers and teaching assistants develop children’s skills effectively, leading imaginative learning and play activities skilfully.
- The curriculum covers an exciting range of subjects, topics and experiences. As a result, the children are knowledgeable about the world and well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders and governors have ensured that pupils are safe and receive excellent care. The site is welcoming and secure, and children are taught how to keep themselves safe and treat one another with kindness.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Although they have significantly improved since the previous inspection, outcomes in reading are not as consistently strong as they are in mathematics and writing.
- A small minority of parents do not feel that they receive sufficient information about the progress their child is making. Leaders and governors do not always communicate the work of the school to parents as effectively as they could.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all parents have full confidence in the work of the school by:
 - improving the communication provided to parents about the progress being made by pupils
 - monitoring and evaluating the views of parents more closely and widening parental participation in school events.

- Sharpen strategic plans for the future growth and improvement of the school by:
 - governors monitoring closely the progress leaders make towards delivering clear, measurable targets for improvement
 - leaders evaluating the impact of their actions regularly
 - monitoring closely the standard of teaching across the school, and delivering pupils' outcomes that are consistently strong in all areas.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher provides a clear vision for the school and is a calm and friendly presence for the pupils. Strategic planning has focused very clearly upon improving the quality of teaching and the curriculum, and he has carefully drawn upon a wide range of support and expertise to help shape improvements. As a result, staff are unanimously positive about the school, and a happy and harmonious climate for learning is securely in place in the school.
- The leadership of teaching has been effective in ensuring that all staff access training, and share good practice between them. A clear vision for what good teaching and learning in the school should look like is set out in the 'Somers Way' protocol that the school has developed. The teaching and learning mentor works energetically and collaboratively with staff to review and reflect upon the planning and delivery of their teaching.
- All staff have clear targets for improving their teaching and the outcomes for pupils. These are recorded in a very helpful 'teaching over time' professional journal. Senior leaders monitor and evaluate this process closely, providing effective training and support, and ensuring that any increases in pay are dependent upon improvement.
- Middle leaders are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their areas of responsibility. For example, the lead teachers for literacy and numeracy regularly review and reshape curriculum plans, lead training for staff and parents, and have worked closely with other local schools to share good practice. They are reflective, and have worked hard to shape and evaluate the impact of new approaches to marking and feedback introduced this year.
- Leaders have been very successful in allocating additional resources to ensure that disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding make progress that is similar to that of other pupils. Additional, small-group tuition and carefully targeted support have resulted in outcomes that are very similar or better than those of other pupils nationally.
- Effective support is provided to pupils with special educational needs or disability. Teachers plan well to meet their needs, and a wide range of one-to-one or small-group activities is run to boost their basic skills. Outcomes for these pupils are good because their needs are being closely tracked and leaders use associated funding, resources and strategies effectively. However, some of the strategies identified to support them could be communicated more clearly.
- The curriculum in the school is well planned and provides a wide range of subjects and exciting experiences. Leaders have drawn upon a number of published and original materials to inform their planning, and place a strong emphasis upon identifying links between subjects and providing experiences beyond the classroom. For example, in Year 6, topic work around the Second World War was enhanced by a visit to the Duxford Imperial War Museum and formed the basis of a wide range of written, artistic and scientific work.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is nurtured very well. Pupils gain a good knowledge of the world and current affairs through experiences such as lessons in Mandarin and French, or topic work and assemblies about world religions, the Commonwealth and the European Union. Pupils learn about the democratic process through the school council and activities such as the joint mock election that was held with a nearby local school last year.
- The primary sport premium funding is used effectively. It provides for specialist coaching, teaching and equipment that are enjoyed by all pupils. Its impact is reviewed annually, but closer analysis of the rates of participation would help inform closer evaluation for leaders and governors.
- Effective external support has helped leaders secure improvements over the last two years. The local authority has provided expertise through the progress board and substantial advisory support to help improve the early years provision. It also brokered support from an external consultant who has worked to help leaders with strategic planning and evaluation. Good links with the Thurrock Teaching School Alliance and local partner schools provide valuable opportunities for training and collaboration.
- Communication with parents is not always as effective as it could be. A significant minority feel that they do not receive enough information from the school, and would appreciate more opportunities to engage with their child's learning. The website does not always provide good information about the work of the school, approaches to teaching and assessment, or expectations in areas such as homework.

■ The governance of the school

- The 'progress board', led by the local authority, was established following the previous inspection, and has helped to shape improvements to governance, and provided leaders with very effective support and challenge. The governing body made a number of key changes following an external review in 2014, and has accessed a wide range of training to inform its work. Governors now challenge school leaders robustly around the work of the school and demonstrate the expertise and knowledge needed to drive further improvements.
 - Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas of weakness, and monitor closely the progress being made by pupils in different areas. They are a regular presence around the school, receive good information from leaders and will challenge the headteacher to provide more detail or more evidence of the impact of initiatives when required.
 - Strategic plans do not always feature clear, measurable steps to improvement for governors to monitor improvements against. There is a need for governors to further sharpen their focus upon the good attendance and progress of all groups of pupils as the school moves forward.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff are all well trained and knowledgeable about the potential risks to pupils and how to report and act upon concerns. Risk assessments are carefully maintained and appropriate, and arrangements for checking the suitability of staff are thorough.
 - Policies and practices for safeguarding children are reviewed regularly by leaders and governors. The school has fully implemented the government's latest guidance on the Prevent strategy (government advice to schools to have due regard to the need to identify signs of extremism and radicalisation).
 - Parents and pupils have confidence in the safety and security of the school site, and children are well supervised during playtimes and lunchtime.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers at Somers Heath have high expectations of what the pupils can achieve. They plan a range of exciting and engaging activities that challenge pupils appropriately, and ensure that high standards of presentation and effort are the norm.
- The promotion of effective communication is central to the approach that all teachers are taking. Pupils regularly and eloquently discuss their work in pairs, small groups or together as a class. For example, Year 6 pupils demonstrated their enthusiasm for learning and their cooperation with one another when debating and discussing life in Britain in the 1950s. The teacher's subject knowledge and enthusiasm fired their imaginations and her questioning drew a number of effective links with other subject areas.
- Assessment is thorough and regular, providing pupils with a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. Teachers highlight errors or identify weaker writing rigorously and provide time for pupils to successfully reshape, correct or improve their work. Often, they provide detailed oral feedback to the pupils that helps to guide them towards improvements.
- Approaches to teaching numeracy provide pupils with challenging problems to solve, and often draw upon links with other subject areas to contextualise new learning. For example, Year 2 pupils reflected on their learning about the growth of seeds when exploring differences and estimating. Pupils are often encouraged to explain or justify their answers and methods using 'convince me' cards, or by feeding back to the class orally about how they arrived at a solution to a problem.
- The classrooms are welcoming and purposeful learning environments. A wide array of practical equipment, technology and helpful displays is used to help pupils learn and to celebrate their work. For example, in one Year 5 history lesson, pupils expertly researched a range of sources about the plague using tablet computers. The stairs leading to the classrooms are decorated with the covers of numerous recommended books, providing a stimulating and inspiring welcome.
- The teaching of literacy is effective. Pupils' reading skills are closely monitored and regularly assessed. All pupils are expected to read at home daily, and teachers run sessions to support parents in promoting good literacy habits. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and have high expectations in terms of the techniques they expect pupils to use when writing and the levels of accuracy required. However, sometimes the guidance and explanation of writing tasks are not quite clear enough to allow pupils to move quickly to independent work.

- Teaching assistants contribute significantly to the effective learning in each classroom. Teachers provide clear guidance to them about how and when to help pupils, and they use well-constructed and regular questions to challenge and support. In Year 6 lessons, for example, the teacher is able to plan and successfully deliver a range of activities for different tables to complete because of the skilful guidance the teaching assistants offer.
- The school's homework policy is applied consistently to help consolidate pupils' skills, particularly in reading and spelling. Older children are provided with study guides to support their literacy and numeracy. Pupils are challenged by their homework but find it manageable. Parents feel that the homework set is appropriate, although the policy and expectations are not made explicit on the school website.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils personal development and welfare is good.
- Arrangements for the reporting of concerns about pupils' welfare and for the support of vulnerable pupils are effective and rigorous. Records of actions are well maintained, and close liaison with other agencies ensures that support is timely and effective.
- The opinions and views of pupils are taken seriously in the school. The school council makes decisions about purchases such as new playground equipment, and the recent addition of a tie to the school uniform came about as a result of pupil consultation.
- The school promotes healthy lifestyles effectively. A wide range of popular sports clubs are run after school, in addition to the specialist coaching and physical education teaching all children experience. Outdoor media screens play through break- and lunchtime, promoting exercise and activity, as well as giving pupils tips for healthy eating.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of the different forms of abuse and bullying and are confident that teachers will act upon any concerns they raise. Bullying is very rare, and occasional unkind behaviours are challenged effectively by teachers. Older pupil prefects act as role models, mentors and friendly faces for younger pupils. As a result, pupils have strong confidence in their safety and in the school's systems for addressing bullying.
- Internet safety is given high prominence around the school. Pupils receive regular lessons and talks about how to keep themselves safe online, complemented by sessions that are run for parents. As a result, pupils have a good understanding of the steps they should take to remain safe.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils demonstrate highly cooperative and enthusiastic attitudes to their learning in lessons. Relationships between pupils and teachers are warm, and all are encouraged to share their ideas and contribute to discussion. As a result, pupils move quickly to work and rarely need reminding to focus their attention.
- The way that pupils volunteer responses to questions and are eager to discuss their learning reflects the good learning habits that teachers have promoted. For example, in science experiments and topic research activities, pupils show a great thirst for knowledge and curiosity, and work collaboratively to gather information and knowledge.
- Pupils play well together and there are few examples of rough or boisterous conduct. Different year groups and genders mix well and are supervised closely by adults at all times. They line up in an orderly fashion and move around the school very calmly. As a result, pupils feel confident that they are safe around the site and enjoy their playtimes.
- Attendance to school has improved significantly in the last year and is now close to the national average. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has also reduced sharply this year. A strong emphasis is placed upon the importance of good attendance through the use of rewards and the regular celebration of good attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 has improved significantly in the last two years and is now good. From starting points that are broadly average compared with national figures, overall attainment across subjects was much higher than average in 2015.
- Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 is good. Attainment in writing and mathematics is much better than the national average, and attainment in reading is better than the national average.
- By the end of Year 1, pupils have made good progress with their reading as a result of effective teaching. In 2015, the proportion of pupils securing the expected level in the phonics screening test was higher than average.
- The overall progress pupils make from their different starting points is good. In writing and mathematics, the proportion of pupils who made or exceeded the expected rates of progress by the end of Key Stage 2 was much higher than the national average in 2015. In reading, the proportion was around the national average.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve very well at Somers Heath. Across their subjects, disadvantaged pupils made significantly better progress than other pupils nationally in 2015. This good progress was especially strong in mathematics, where they made significantly better progress than other pupils nationally, and better progress than their more advantaged peers in the school.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disability make good progress as a result of effective support and good teaching that recognises and meets their different needs. In 2015, the progress they made across subjects from their different starting points was similar to that of other pupils in the school.
- The most-able pupils achieve very well. In 2015, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 in mathematics and writing at the end of Key Stage 2 was much higher than the national average, and slightly higher than average in reading. The overall progress that the most-able pupils make from their higher starting points is better than similar pupils nationally.
- The improvements secured in pupils' outcomes in recent years are strongly in evidence across all current year groups. Year 6 pupils are making rapid progress towards securing good outcomes by the end of this year. Performance information indicates that the slightly weaker outcomes in reading are improving; for example, in Years 3 and 5, pupils are making stronger progress in reading than in mathematics. Where progress is found to be less strong, for example in mathematics with the current Year 2 pupils, effective and rapid action is taken to improve provision.
- Pupils are well prepared for the transition to secondary school. A programme of visits and liaison with teachers from the schools give them confidence, knowledge and information. Effective teaching approaches are equipping them with the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed.

Early years provision

is good

- Many of the strengths of the school are established in the very positive experience children have in the early years provision. On average, children enter the early years with levels of communication and language skills below those typical for their age. They make rapid progress as a result of effective teaching and close monitoring and support. Their books and records of learning demonstrate that impressive improvements to their writing and number skills are secured in a short period of time.
- Teachers and teaching assistants question and challenge children's thinking well to help them develop their language and social skills. For example, in Nursery, adults closely guide children in story-telling and the sharing of imaginative ideas using small toys. Children are taught successfully to greet and respond to adults and each other appropriately.
- Leaders have a good understanding of the progress the children are making and monitor it closely. For example, in Reception the progress being made in numeracy is recorded in detail in all children's books by the teacher, and photographs sit alongside the children's own written work to demonstrate the children securing new skills and gaining new understanding. As a result of this systematic approach, the proportion of pupils reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception has risen rapidly in recent years, and is now around the national average.

- The children play comfortably and cooperatively together, either in small groups or on a one-to-one basis. Parents spoken to confirmed that their children have settled into Nursery and Reception very easily. Opportunities for parents to engage and share in their children's learning are not as frequent as they could be, but recent initiatives such as online learning journals and an arts and crafts open event are helping to improve this.

School details

Unique reference number	114847
Local authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	10009138

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	260
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Allen
Headteacher	Kevin Imbush
Telephone number	01708 853397
Website	www.somersheathschool.ik.org
Email address	admin@somersheath.thurrock.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	25–26 February 2014

Information about this school

- Somers Heath Primary School is slightly smaller than the average-sized primary school, but is growing rapidly. There are currently two classes in Reception and Year 2, and the school will expand into new buildings and add further classes next year.
- The majority of pupils are White British, with a smaller proportion than average coming from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average, but has increased in recent years.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding (additional government funding to support pupils who are looked after or who are known to be eligible for free school meals) is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is slightly above the national average. The overall proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disability is slightly below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 16 lessons, visiting each class in the school in order to contribute to their evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Observations were also conducted jointly with the headteacher. Inspectors also observed small-group sessions and assemblies.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, school leaders, teachers, representatives of the local authority, governors and various groups of pupils. A telephone meeting was held with an external consultant supporting the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of school documentation, including that relating to policies, the minutes of governing body meetings, annual review, self-evaluation, pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance data, and a wide range of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 21 questionnaires returned by school staff. Discussions were also held with a range of parents at the school gates.
- Inspectors scrutinised the various forms of communication the school uses, including the website and information sent to parents and other stakeholders.

Inspection team

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