

Sir Robert Hitcham Church of England Voluntary Aided School

School Corner, Debenham, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 6PL

Inspection dates

28–29 March 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- In two of the last three years, too few pupils leaving Year 2 at the expected standard achieved the equivalent standard at the end of Year 6.
- Pupils’ progress as they move through the school from one year group to the next, and in some subjects, varies too much.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not make enough progress.
- The difference between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is not decreasing. The main reason is that the attendance of a significant number of these pupils is too low.
- Recent improvements in teaching and learning, for example in grammar and mathematics, need longer to become fully established.
- A few teachers fail to spot that pupils have not understood and need extra instruction.
- English and mathematics subject leaders are relatively new. The important changes they have implemented need longer to make a significant difference.
- Leadership of other subjects, for example in history and geography, is in its infancy.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher’s strong and decisive leadership, fully supported by governors, other leaders and staff, is improving the quality of education provided by the school.
- Children get a good start to their education in the Nursery and Reception classes, so they are well prepared for Year 1.
- Recent changes are beginning to make a difference, for example school assessment information indicates that the proportion of pupils reaching a high standard by the end of Year 6 is likely to rise this year.
- Over time, pupils’ attainment at the end of Year 2 has been above the national average.
- Pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the achievement of middle prior attaining pupils by:
 - ensuring that pupils' starting points are used when planning learning, and their knowledge and skills built on effectively, so that tasks offer appropriate challenge
 - regularly checking on how well pupils are learning and recognising and correcting pupils' misunderstandings and misconceptions.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils make consistently good or better progress as they move through the school, by ensuring that teachers:
 - fully understand, and implement effectively, the school's changes to teaching and learning.
- Strengthen the role of middle leaders, so they have a more direct impact on improving pupils' outcomes, by:
 - ensuring that all subjects have suitable leadership
 - developing leaders' skills so that they can more rigorously monitor the quality of teaching and learning and more effectively contribute to improving standards
 - ensuring that all foundation subject leaders make regular checks on the quality of work in their areas, as is being done in English and mathematics, and use the information to drive forward any necessary improvements.
- Further develop the leadership and management of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities by:
 - improving the monitoring and evaluation of the provision to ensure that it is meeting pupils' needs
 - ensuring that extra help provided for these pupils is appropriate and effective.
- Seek further ways to reduce absence, particularly of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- English and mathematics subject leaders are too recently in post to have made a significant difference to pupils' attainment and progress in these subjects. They are skilled and enthusiastic and benefit from high-quality training. They know what needs to be done, and have begun to make substantial changes. They check standards regularly. However, some techniques need further refining, for example how to give the clear and precise feedback to colleagues that will lead to further improvements.
- In most other subjects, leadership is in its infancy. While leaders have rightly focused on English and mathematics, this means that checks in other subjects are insufficient.
- The management of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has not enabled many of these pupils to progress sufficiently to a point when they no longer require additional support. Although funds are spent in the right areas of extra help, the effect on pupils' learning is diminished because pupils are not guided appropriately back in to their regular lessons.
- The recent past has not been an easy time for Sir Robert Hitcham School. A deficit budget has affected everyone's morale and restricted the resources available for the headteacher to rapidly implement the changes needed. While improving, the financial situation is still not fully resolved.
- The headteacher's high expectations of everyone, particularly herself, drive the school forward. The assistant headteacher, other leaders, governors and staff share her resolve. Everyone wants the best for the pupils.
- All of the staff responding to their online survey enjoy working at the school. The vast majority feel proud to be a member of staff, and agree that leaders do all they can to ensure that the school has a motivated, respected and effective teaching staff.
- The headteacher has established a culture where pupils strive to do their best. The school is fully inclusive. Within its Christian ethos, all pupils are welcomed into the school family.
- The headteacher's clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas to improve, and her accurate use of data, ensure that energy and the available resources are targeted in the right areas. For example, she rightly recognised that changes needed to be made to the teaching of mathematics and grammar. She knows that spelling, too, needs improvement but recognises staff need to fully embed recent improvements before embarking on more.
- The headteacher's 'joined-up' thinking means that regular checks of teaching lead to suitable quality training, and that some performance management targets are linked to improving pupils' outcomes. This is a recent improvement. Staff share her determination to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Pupils say they like the curriculum topics. Teachers present activities in a way that interests pupils, and draws them into the learning. For example, Year 3 pupils used the outdoor wooded area in their 'Stone Age' topic. They presented their learning to the

rest of the school, and older pupils said they were envious not to have learned that topic when they were in Year 3. Visits and visitors further enrich learning opportunities.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength. Christian values are at the heart of daily life. The school's place in the community is strong.
- Pupils' clear understanding of British values is based on their school experiences. For example, in class debates such as 'Should the law be changed so you can vote at 16?' they learn to offer their views, and listen to those of others, knowing everyone's opinion matters. One said, 'Democracy means everyone gets the same rights'.
- Additional pupil premium funding is generally used effectively, for example to support these pupils' well-being, emotional and mental health. However, more could be done to improve attendance.
- Additional physical education and sports funding is spent very wisely. The aim is clear: not only improvement today, but long-term sustainability. For example, a gymnastics specialist teaches pupils so they are able to compete successfully, but also trains class teachers so they can carry on her work.
- The local authority supports the school well, for example giving advice on suitable training for staff.
- Links with other schools benefit pupils and staff. For example, staff participate in training with those from other schools, sharing ideas.
- About nine in every 10 parents responding to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, would recommend the school to another parent. However, about a quarter have concerns about how the school responds to their concerns, and communication generally. The school has recently re-established a 'parents' forum' with the aim of improving communication and resolving concerns.

Governance of the school

- Since the review of governance in autumn 2016 the governing body is becoming more effective. Governors benefited greatly from recent training, advice and guidance. As a result:
 - they reorganised so the committee structure is more efficient
 - every governor is now clear about their roles and responsibilities, and those of others
 - their understanding of their strategic role is much clearer
 - governors monitor more rigorously and regularly, for example on 'deep dive day' they talk to pupils about their learning.
- Governors clearly understand the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They seek a wide range of information and views. For example, they ask Year 7 teachers for their thoughts on how well pupils are prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Governors hold school leaders to account for ensuring that the school is improving, and changes are working. For example, they receive regular reports from the new subject leaders as well as the headteacher. Governors are realistic; one commented, 'I'm

seeing a slight improvement in maths', while adding, 'We understand there is some way to go before we see the impact.'

- Spending decisions are firmly rooted in the best interests of pupils. For example, resources for the teaching of grammar are beginning to raise standards.
- Governors check that additional funding, such as the pupil premium, is making a positive difference to the areas it is spent on, such as pupils' well-being.
- Governors oversee the performance of staff, including the headteacher, closely.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Two leaders share the role, so that one is always on site and available. Together they work effectively, for example talking over any concern and sharing their expertise.
- School leaders and governors give safeguarding a high priority. They have created a culture where staff work closely together to promote pupils' safety and welfare.
- Leaders ensure that training, such as in child protection and the 'Prevent' duty, is up to date. As a result, staff have a good awareness of what to look for in order to keep pupils safe. Staff said they are confident in raising any concerns.
- The school swiftly involves outside agencies should action be needed to address concerns, or seek help to support families.
- Documentation is comprehensive and detailed. Checks on the suitability of staff, governors, volunteers and contractors are thorough. Governors conduct regular checks on safeguarding processes and procedures. A good practice is that data is protected by two passwords, one to view and one to edit.
- The overwhelming majority of parents responding to their online survey agreed that their children are safe in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching varies across the school in different classes and subjects. As a result, in some year groups pupils do not make the progress they should. Work seen in pupils' books, the school's information about pupils' progress, and the school's records of teaching and learning confirm this.
- Some recent improvements to teaching and learning, for example in the teaching of grammar and mathematics, need longer to become fully embedded.
- In lessons, teachers sometimes fail to recognise when pupils do not fully understand and need to go over their learning. This applies particularly to the middle prior attaining pupils, and has an adverse effect on their learning. Some tasks given to these pupils are too challenging.
- Some pupils who receive extra help do not understand sufficiently to enable them to apply this new learning successfully in their regular lessons. Again, progress slows.

- Relationships between the vast majority of pupils and staff are very positive. As a result, lessons generally run smoothly. Four in every five pupils responding to their online survey agreed that their teachers help them to do their best in most or all lessons.
- Teachers generally deploy teaching assistants effectively. In one lesson, for example, the teaching assistant explained to the pupil, made sure he understood the task, and then helped another group while keeping an eye on the original pupil to see he succeeded in figuring out the answer. However, this is inconsistent across the school.
- Staff teach speaking and listening skills well. For example, the new approach to mathematics requires pupils to articulate their thinking and explain how they came by their answers.
- Reading skills are taught well. As pupils progress, staff make sure pupils receive the right level of challenge, for example in the vocabulary they learn.
- Staff create many opportunities for pupils to practise writing skills in lessons other than English. However, the school's approach to introducing writing tasks is inconsistently applied by teachers. The teaching of grammar, too, is not embedded.
- The teaching of mathematics is improving. Pupils enjoy and engage in opportunities to grapple with problems, and work together to solve them.
- Homework is used effectively. Parents said they were surprised how much their children enjoy the recently introduced online mathematics homework, and equally the positive impact it is making on children's learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Nine in every 10 parents responding to their online survey agreed their children are happy at school. Four in every five pupils said they enjoy school most or all of the time.
- The vast majority of pupils try hard in lessons and want to learn. They persevere to figure things out when they are stuck. Only rarely do they lose concentration, for example when their teachers do not recognise they need extra help.
- Pupils increasingly enjoy learning. Referring to the new mathematics homework, one girl said, with a hint of surprise in her voice, 'Even though it's maths it's fun!' Pupils also said they enjoy researching for homework about a wide variety of topics including 'ancient civilisation' and 'the water cycle'. They particularly like using technology to design presentations to show their classmates.
- Parents said they were attracted to the school by the sense of community and 'family-feel'. Older pupils enjoy nothing more than helping those younger than themselves. For example, they help the youngest at playtimes.
- Pupils welcome the many opportunities to take responsibility. They like to make a difference, whether it is suggesting a 'buddy bench' for lonely pupils or organising cakes for a charity fundraising.

- Assemblies encourage pupils to reflect. Pupils lead assemblies on themes such as 'courage', showing people of courage and explaining what they did. Scenarios when pupils themselves may show courage are discussed, along with possible outcomes from different choices.
- Pupils' preparation for life in multicultural Britain is good. For example, 'Diversity Day' includes visitors of many faiths, and none.
- Pupils' preparation for the future is also enhanced by 'Careers' Week'. Aspirations are raised and opportunities explained by talking to a variety of people about their jobs.
- Pupils' well-being is given an increasingly high priority. Disadvantaged pupils and those with social and emotional needs thrive because they are nurtured.
- Pupils said they feel safe in school. This is confirmed by their online survey. Nearly every pupil responding to their survey agreed there is an adult at school they can talk to if something is worrying them.
- Pupils' good understanding of how to stay safe, whether while cycling or using the internet, is the result of regular learning and safety reminders.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. In the previous academic year, the absence of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was high. Although procedures are clear and rigorous, and the school welcomes advice from outside agencies, absence of these vulnerable pupils remains high. Attendance of other pupils is slightly above average.
- The conduct of the vast majority of pupils is good. Staff 'go the extra mile' to help the small proportion of pupils who struggle to manage their own behaviour. The school makes good use of specialist expertise and support from outside agencies. About three quarters of parents responding to the online survey agreed that the school makes sure its pupils are well behaved. Nine in every 10 pupils feel the behaviour of other pupils in lessons and around the school is good some or most of the time.
- Pupils understand that bullying can take different forms. They say they are confident staff would respond quickly and effectively should any pupil be bullied. This is confirmed by their online survey; four in every five pupils said teachers are good at resolving bullying.
- Pupils respond well to praise and reward. They enjoy earning house points or certificates for good behaviour or achievement.
- Pupils work and play well together. In class, they enjoy opportunities to work as a group and collaborate. At playtimes, they mix well. In suitable weather, they enjoy the school grounds. Pupils and governors say play space is limited during wet weather.
- Pupils move around the school sensibly and safely. They invariably hold the door open for others and are particularly considerate to those younger than themselves.
- Pupils take pride in themselves, their workbooks and their school. They treat equipment with care and help keep the school tidy.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- In two of the last three years, pupils made too little progress from the start of Year 3 to the end of Year 6. In particular, too few pupils who just met the expected standard at the end of Year 2 made good progress in Years 3 to 6.
- Progress made by pupils as they move through the school has been variable over time. Progress of pupils currently in the school is improving, although inconsistencies remain between classes and subjects.
- The difference between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is not decreasing. For many of these pupils, this is because they miss a relatively high proportion of schooling.
- Some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make too little progress. This is largely because these pupils do not understand the skills they learn in extra lessons well enough to use and apply them in their regular lessons.
- Attainment in phonics is good. Right from Nursery, children acquire good phonics skills and use them accurately. Reading is a strength of the school.
- Since the previous inspection, teachers in Years 1 and 2 have continued to build well on the good start in early years so that attainment at the end of Year 2 has generally been above average in reading, writing and mathematics. In particular, the proportion above the standard expected for their age has been high.
- Over the past three years, attainment at the end of Year 6 has generally been broadly similar to, or a little above, the national average. However, progress in Years 3 to 6 has been inconsistent resulting in progress for some groups being significantly below the national average in 2016. Pupils' work in their books and the school's information about progress suggests that improvements made in the recent past, such as in mathematics, are beginning to make a difference.
- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils who attend well, make good progress. Again, pupils' work in their books and the school's information about progress show that these pupils do well. The proportion likely to attain the more advanced 'higher standard' in reading and mathematics and 'greater depth' in writing by the end of Year 6 is increasing. This is an improvement since the last inspection.
- Mathematics was an area for improvement from the previous inspection. Recently, the school has introduced a new approach that is beginning to benefit pupils. While this is an improvement, more needs to be done. For example, the school still expects one in every ten Year 6 pupil to make less progress in mathematics than in reading.

Early years provision

Good

- Most children start school, whether in the Nursery or Reception classes, with skills typical for their age group. They make good progress and the proportion reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception is above the national average. Current school assessment information and inspection evidence suggests this

proportion is set to rise this year.

- In both classes, children settle quickly and the day gets off to a good start. Children know the routines well, what they can expect and what staff expect of them.
- Children listen closely and respond very positively to everything staff ask of them. They enjoy the times when older pupils help them, too.
- Children immerse themselves in a wide range of interesting activities. However, there is sometimes so much to see and do that children move quickly from one activity to another with little focus or perseverance.
- Children's personal development is good. With staff support, children establish good habits by the time they enter Year 1.
- Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are cared for very well and generally flourish. However, staff sometimes do not step back and give them time to try and figure things out for themselves.
- Children behave well. They listen to, and follow, instructions of staff. They have an awareness of one another and play cooperatively, especially with particular friends.
- Teaching is good. Staff take every opportunity to promote early number, writing and reading skills, including phonics. They note children's achievements and interests and use this information to plan the following day's activities.
- The early years leader and other staff are knowledgeable and well trained. They are reflective, regularly looking for areas they can improve upon. Safeguarding is effective and children's welfare needs are met.
- Assessment is used effectively. Staff have a clear plan for each child's development. Parents like the online system that they too can access in 'real-time'.
- The relationship with parents is positive. Parents say their children settle quickly into early years, do well and make a smooth transfer to Year 1.

School details

Unique reference number	124774
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10005676

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Suzanne Pearce
Headteacher	Julia van Ek
Telephone number	01728 860201
Website	www.sirroberthitcham.suffolk.sch.uk
Email address	admin@sirroberthitcham.suffolk.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–15 June 2012

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is slightly smaller than an average-sized primary school.
- There is one class in each year group, from Reception to Year 6.
- The school also operates a Nursery class five mornings a week.
- The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- All pupils speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium funding is well below average.
- The overall proportion of pupils who receive support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities is well below average.

- In 2016, the school met the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations of pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- An independent breakfast club runs daily. It is inspected separately.
- An independent pre-school is housed on the school site. It is inspected separately.
- The school houses the village branch of the county library.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited all classrooms. Some visits were conducted jointly with the headteacher. In addition, the inspectors observed small groups of pupils being taught.
- The inspectors looked at work in pupils' books and listened to pupils read.
- The inspectors observed pupils in other activities and as they moved around the school and site.
- The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other leaders, teachers, other staff and governors. Inspectors also spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors met with pupils to discuss their experiences at school.
- The views of 72 parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account. The inspectors also held informal discussions with parents. The inspectors considered the views of 19 members of staff and 66 pupils who responded to their online surveys.
- The inspectors looked at a range of school documents and information. These included the school's development plan, checks on the quality of teaching, curriculum plans, minutes of meetings of the governing body and pupils' behaviour and attendance records. The inspectors also looked at arrangements for safeguarding procedures, including relevant records.

Inspection team

Robert Greatrex, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Henry Weir	Ofsted Inspector
Ollie Millington	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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