

Cobham Free School

89–95 Portsmouth Road, Cobham, Surrey KT11 1JJ

Inspection dates

13–14 September 2017

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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have created a culture of high aspirations for all. Staff are committed to the ambitious ethos of the school and provide good support for their pupils.
- The broad and balanced curriculum provides pupils with academic challenge alongside strong support for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- Outcomes for all pupils are strong. A much higher proportion of pupils in key stage 2, including disadvantaged pupils, achieved expected standards in reading and mathematics than nationally.
- Governors are committed to the vision for the school. They have a wide skill set and use this strategically to hold leaders to account.
- Children in the early years make a good start to their school life and are prepared well for their next steps.
- Shared ways of working are not routinely agreed across the split school site. Leaders' evaluations of projects are inconsistent and information about pupils is not consistently communicated promptly enough.
- Leaders do not routinely monitor junior pupils' progress in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils are confident, articulate and proud of their school. They enjoy their lessons and the vast array of extra-curricular opportunities provided. They behave very well and demonstrate respect to visitors and each other.
- Pupils feel safe at school. They report that bullying is not accepted at all. They say that teachers are very prompt and effective in dealing with any unkind behaviour.
- Safeguarding is effective. Staff are well trained and know what to do if they are worried about a child.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have established very positive relationships with pupils. Most teachers adapt lessons quickly to help pupils make good progress.
- Skilled teaching helps pupils to make good progress. Thoughtful use of questioning and modelling successfully challenges pupils to apply their learning.
- The overwhelming majority of parents are full of praise for the school. Many describe it as a 'family' and find staff to be inclusive and caring. A small minority raised concerns about communication from leaders and governors.
- Leaders' work to improve the attendance of a minority of pupils has not yet had enough impact.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Share best leadership practice across the school, particularly with relation to the evaluation of pupils' progress and school projects.
- Reduce rates of absence, especially for the most vulnerable pupils.
- Improve communication with staff, parents and the wider community.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have established a clear and ambitious vision for this through-school. They have created a culture of high aspiration that runs through the school.
- Leaders have successfully designed the curriculum in order to balance academic ambition with a range of activities that promote pupils' wider development. The extended day offer, along with a wider core curriculum that includes music, modern foreign languages and sport, is a key part of the culture of the school. As a consequence, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is developed well.
- The highly motivated staff fully subscribe to the ethos of the school and work very hard to provide a wide range of opportunities. Pupils benefit from a raft of extra-curricular activities, such as gardening, rock band, computing, journalism and paper aeroplane design. Clubs are integral to the identity of the school and most pupils participate in such activities.
- Pupils, especially those in the senior phase, describe an inclusive school culture which promotes fundamental British values and prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. For example, the model United Nations project challenges pupils to consider world events from different perspectives and contexts.
- Staff are proud to be part of the school community and value the professional development and support they are given. Leaders' vision of 'everyone a learner' means that staff are often challenged to learn alongside pupils. For example, the head of the junior phase learned how to play the ukulele and performed for her pupils. Staff explain how such activities mean that they better understand the process of learning and therefore further develop their teaching and planning skills.
- Leaders in the senior phase have established useful informal partnerships with other providers and use these to moderate assessments and share best practice. This has helped middle leaders to develop strong approaches to the curriculum, for example in mathematics. Leaders are aware of the need to continue such partnerships in order to routinely monitor their level of challenge as the school continues to grow.
- Leaders use some additional funding very effectively. For example, pupils receiving extra support as part of the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding make rapid progress in these areas. However, leaders have not consistently analysed the impact of projects funded by the pupil premium and sports premium. This means that their planning for future spending is not based on full knowledge of which elements were most successful.
- The temporary split site means that, rightly, many aspects of leadership are repeated for the junior and senior phases, for example each site has designated safeguarding leads and special educational needs coordinators. Leaders are aware of the need to improve the communication between both phases so that essential information is shared more promptly. Currently, there is a lack of cohesion between the phases, including inconsistency in leadership approaches.
- Leaders in the junior phase do not routinely monitor pupils' progress in subjects other

than reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders also plan to more systematically review and evaluate the junior phase curriculum.

- Leaders are aware that some of the information published on the school website does not fully meet government recommendations. They have taken action to address this and by the end of the inspection much of the missing information was in place.

Governance of the school

- Governors are passionate about the school and work hard to support leaders to achieve the vision for the school. A very small minority of parents and staff raised concerns about the governing body, questioning its transparency and communication. Governors realise the need to make sure that their work is fully understood by all stakeholders and are working to improve their communications.
- The governing body has actively recruited governors with the specific skills required to fulfil their duties. This has helped them to hold leaders to account, for example regarding financial decisions.
- Governors are aware that the evaluation of the use of additional funding, such as the pupil premium and sports funding, is not as sharp as it should be. They have started to improve this in order to use this information to inform future spending plans.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have ensured that all staff are fully trained, with frequent updates and checks on their understanding of the systems and procedures. They have put robust risk assessments in place to deal with the challenges of using multiple sites. Staff follow these carefully and they are reviewed regularly.
- Pupils feel safe and have a clear understanding of how to stay safe. They told inspectors that staff deal promptly and effectively with any issue that they raise.
- The overwhelming majority of parents agree that their children are kept safe. The school offers support to parents to ensure that all pupils are supported and safe, including through workshops; for example, to help keep pupils safe online.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Positive relationships between pupils and staff can be seen throughout the school. Staff know pupils very well and carefully match and adapt learning tasks to meet pupils' individual needs and help them to make good progress. Pupils trust their teachers and teaching assistants and will attempt work even if it appears tricky to start with. Pupils and staff share high expectations and pride in learning.
- High-quality questioning and modelling are key features of lessons. Teachers and teaching assistants use a range of questioning styles to develop pupils' thinking and learning. Clear explanations and demonstrations help pupils to fully understand new concepts and ideas.

- Teachers and leaders monitor pupils' progress closely and provide good support for those pupils who need to catch up or move on faster. Senior phase pupils told inspectors that they appreciate the extra time that teachers freely give and they can see the difference that it makes.
- Teachers insist on pupils using accurate terminology and subject-specific vocabulary, for example in music and science. When appropriate, they explore language links and this helps to develop pupils' literacy across the curriculum.
- Pupils told inspectors that they like the homework that is routinely set. Junior phase pupils described it as 'fun' and 'helpful', whereas senior phase pupils found it purposeful and 'useful'. Tasks are varied and help pupils to consolidate learning and make progress.
- Reading is promoted across the school and pupils read to an inspector with passion and flair. Junior and senior phase pupils were clear that reading is valued and they enjoy the opportunities to discuss books with their peers. Guided reading lessons in the junior phase support pupils to apply the strong phonic skills they have learned.
- Teachers use teaching assistants well to support pupils with their learning. Many teachers and teaching assistants have very strong subject knowledge. They use this to adapt their approaches and explanations to make sure that all pupils can make good progress.
- In the vast majority of lessons, the most able pupils are routinely challenged to make rapid progress. Occasionally, they are held back from starting more challenging work because teachers wait for the whole class to move on together.
- The school's policy for providing pupils with feedback is not routinely applied across the school. Senior phase pupils appreciate the feedback they receive, often verbal, that helps them understand what to do in order to move on. However, scrutiny of junior phase pupils' books shows that some pupils' misconceptions are not addressed and so they continue to make the same errors.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils and parents are very positive about the ethos of the school, with many describing it as a 'family'. Pupils in the senior phase were very keen to tell inspectors that bullying and unkind behaviour are not tolerated. They described a supportive community where staff act swiftly and effectively to stop any unkindness.
- Inspectors saw high levels of pride and respect during their visit. Pupils held doors open for each other and for visitors, held thoughtful conversations during lunchtimes and cleared up after themselves. They were keen to talk about their school and the opportunities they could see it provide.
- The vast majority of pupils participate in the wide array of extra-curricular opportunities that support pupils' development. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about their residential trip to France and musical performances.

- Pupils feel valued and listened to by staff. They enjoy the leadership responsibilities they have, including being trained as peer mentors.
- Enterprise projects and careers education helps to ensure that pupils are prepared well for their next steps. They are confident in their GCSE option choices and share leaders' and teachers' high aspirations.
- Welfare support and guidance are strong through the school. Pupils, parents and staff agree that they feel pupils are kept safe and are well looked after in school. However, leaders recognise the need to improve communication between the senior and junior sites in order to make sure that information about pupils is shared promptly.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite, friendly, confident and articulate. They value their learning and the wider opportunities provided by the school. They are proud to be part of Cobham Free School.
- Pupils told inspectors that they liked the 'zero tolerance' behaviour policy because it is 'clear and fair'. Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. They use the spaces thoughtfully and follow instructions quickly. Disruption is rare.
- Pupils in the senior phase particularly appreciate the positive culture and encouragement to keep trying at tasks that they might find tricky. In addition, they are very enthusiastic about what they term as 'seriously good' rewards.
- Despite efforts by staff, attendance of pupils from vulnerable groups is not yet good enough. Leaders understand the need to continue their work to improve this.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Overall outcomes for pupils are good.
- Outcomes for pupils in reading, writing and mathematics are strong and often better than those of other pupils nationally. For example, in 2016 key stage 2 pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, made progress in reading and mathematics that was in the top 10% of schools nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been much higher than the national figure for the last three years.
- Pupils in the senior phase have not yet taken external examinations. School information and pupils' work in books indicates that most are making good progress across the curriculum, including in English and mathematics.
- All groups of pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress across the curriculum. Leaders and teachers track their progress carefully and use additional funding to provide extra support.
- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, make good progress across the curriculum. Many are working above national expectations and attain very highly.

- In the senior phase, leaders track each pupil's progress in each subject. Leaders provide timely and high-quality support for pupils if they start to fall behind. This is closely matched to pupils' needs and, as a consequence, is effective.
- In the junior phase, leaders do not routinely track the progress of pupils in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' books indicate that most make good progress in foundation subjects.

Early years provision

Good

- The children in early years are confident and inquisitive. Adults' close work with families and feeder nurseries means that children settle quickly into life at school. Inspectors observed children happily playing and learning together after only a handful of days at school. For example, a group of boys who didn't know each other before starting school were working very well together while searching for 'treasure' in sand.
- The early years leader has successfully trained staff to monitor closely each child's progress with different activities. This information is used carefully to plan and adapt activities to match children's needs and interests. Adults use the inside and outside learning areas creatively to move children's learning on.
- Outcomes in early years are above national averages. Children arrive with good phonics knowledge and this is built on in well-planned phonics lessons. Consequently, children quickly learn to read and write.
- Most children make good progress from their starting points. The careful tracking and support that children receive means that they are academically and socially ready for their transition to Year 1. Additional funding is used successfully to support children's progress and attainment.
- Behaviour is very good. Children work and play well together. They follow instructions quickly; for example, in a sports lesson children were alert and attentive.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school, with many commenting on what one described as the, 'excellent welcoming process'. Others comment on the 'great communication' that means they already feel part of 'a family'.
- The early years leader has evaluated and put in place actions designed to strengthen tracking and reporting processes further, but it is too early to see what impact they have had. Previous work, for example to accelerate boys' progress with literacy, was very effective and has resulted in improved outcomes.
- Leaders recognise the need to check their judgements about children's attainment, including starting points, to ensure that they are accurate. For example, inspectors observed children working at a higher level than adults assessed them to be.

School details

Unique reference number	138226
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10036930

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	472
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Howard Morris
Executive Headteacher	Michaela Khatib
Telephone number	03303 300237
Website	www.cobhamfreeschool.org.uk
Email address	info@cobhamfreeschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–15 May 2014

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, the senior phase of the school has opened for key stage 3 and 4 pupils. This senior provision opened in September 2014. Currently, the junior and senior phases are based on separate sites, although there are plans to move to a single site as a through-school.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized through-school but continues to grow in size. A sixth form is planned to open in September 2019.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is below average.
- The school provides a breakfast club and a range of after-school clubs.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school has links with the Yehudi Menuhin School and the Chelsea Football Club Foundation who provide specialist teaching in music and sport.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum

expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about pupil premium funding or sport premium funding on its website.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about pupil premium funding or sport premium funding.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 31 lessons across a range of subjects and year groups. Several of these lessons were observed jointly with school leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, other staff and governors. Inspectors also took account of the views of the 33 staff who completed Ofsted's online survey, including 11 free-text comments.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and spoke with pupils in lessons and around the school. They also met formally with groups of pupils and considered the views from the 70 pupils who responded to Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- Inspectors spoke with parents during the inspection and considered the 177 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online parent survey, including 115 free-text comments. They also took account of the views of two parents who contacted Ofsted directly during the inspection.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed during lessons, around the school and during play, break and lunchtimes.
- A wide range of documentation was reviewed, including information available on the school's website and records relating to pupils' attainment, progress, attendance and behaviour. Information on governance, including minutes of governors' meetings, was examined. The school's self-evaluation summary and supporting evidence was scrutinised, along with records on the school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe.

Inspection team

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Gary Tostevin	Ofsted Inspector

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