

Sir Robert Hitcham Church of England Voluntary Aided School

School Corner, Debenham, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 6PL

Inspection dates

6–7 June 2019

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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Governors' actions to hold leaders to account have not resulted in notably higher standards for pupils since the previous inspection.
- Leaders are not diligent in ensuring that they routinely challenge weak teaching and share good practice across the school.
- Leaders' monitoring of arrangements to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is not ensuring that they make enough progress.
- Effective curriculum planning to ensure that pupils make good progress across the full range of subjects is in its early stages of development.
- Leaders have not been successful in dealing with the challenging behaviour of a small number of pupils.
- Teachers do not always set work at the right level of difficulty for pupils. This means that work is sometimes too easy and sometimes too hard.
- Too few pupils make good progress in mathematics in key stage 2 because the quality of teaching in the subject is not consistently good.
- Recent improvements in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have not been sufficiently strong over time to ensure that they sustain good progress.

The school has the following strengths

- The teaching of phonics is strong. Pupils read to a high standard across the school.
- Children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes, and are well prepared to enter key stage 1.
- The school is a caring and nurturing environment that meets the spiritual, moral, social and cultural needs of its pupils well.
- Pupils perform well in sport and physical education (PE). School teams have competed successfully in local sporting competitions.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, by:
 - strengthening the capacity and impact of leadership for pupils with SEND
 - further improving the quality of leadership for all subject areas to develop an effective curriculum and assessment system that enables pupils to make good progress in each subject
 - ensuring that governors hold the school's leadership to account more effectively
 - monitoring and evaluating the impact of improvements in the quality of teaching on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, by:
 - ensuring that teachers continue to develop learning activities that better match pupils' starting points so that they can more easily develop and extend their learning
 - better sharing the good practice already found in the school.
- Improve pupils' progress in mathematics in key stage 2, by:
 - ensuring that leaders check that agreed strategies for improvement are applied consistently across all year groups
 - further improving the curriculum to support pupils to develop stronger mathematical skills and apply them successfully to a range of reasoning problems.
- Improve the quality of behaviour by seeking advice and support to develop ways to deal with the challenging behaviour of a small number of pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Since the last inspection, they have implemented strategies to rectify weaknesses in the quality of teaching. This has led to better attainment for some pupils, but the rate of improvement in raising standards overall has been too slow. Leaders are motivated to make improvements, but some actions have not been effective.
- Leaders and governors are proud of the caring and nurturing ethos of the school. Their vision places the school at the heart of the community, with its strong links to the local parish church. Leaders are diligent in making sure that the school provides opportunities to meet pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural needs.
- The nurturing culture of the school means that almost all relationships between staff and pupils are positive, and that the general atmosphere of the school is caring and friendly. A few relationships are strained because leaders have not dealt effectively with the behaviour of a very small number of pupils.
- Leaders and governors are ambitious in their use of external support and training to help staff to improve, and staff are appreciative of the professional development. Working closely with nearby schools and the local authority, leaders have provided training to improve practice, particularly in mathematics, but this has not made a significant impact on outcomes for pupils in some year groups and subjects.
- The school's curriculum is sufficiently broad and balanced, but it is not well enough planned and structured to enable pupils to acquire secure knowledge, understanding and skills across the whole range of subjects. In some subjects, it is not clear how pupils build their knowledge and understanding from one lesson to the next, especially when teaching and learning in these subjects are irregular and infrequent.
- Subject leaders use accurate assessment information to monitor standards closely in English and mathematics. They do not, however, challenge and support staff determinedly when the assessment information identifies pupils and groups of pupils who are falling behind, and nor do they share the best practice widely.
- Leaders for English have developed a consistency of approach and expectation across the school that enables pupils in key stage 2 to build on the secure reading and writing skills developed in early years and key stage 1. The impact of leaders in improving teaching and outcomes in mathematics is patchy because they are not ensuring that all teachers are consistently implementing changes in approaches.
- The leadership of subjects other than English and mathematics is improving, but it is not good enough. Subject leaders are reflective about their subjects, and speak with enthusiasm about their ambitions, but some of them do not know enough about standards in their subjects or the content of their curriculum to ensure that pupils make consistently good progress.
- Leaders are thoughtful about how best to serve the small number of disadvantaged pupils in the school, for example by creating opportunities for their social and emotional needs to be well met. Even so, too many are not making good progress

because teaching is not consistently good.

- Insufficient time is dedicated to the leadership of provision and effective allocation of funding for pupils with SEND. Staff and parents and carers expressed concern about the limitations this places on the school's ability to seek speedy support from external agencies for pupils with SEND. Inspection findings concur that pupils with SEND are not making good progress.
- Leaders have ensured that the PE and sport premium is used well. The school's PE leader uses the funding to ensure that sustainable improvements are made to the quality of PE teaching, as well as enabling a large number of pupils to represent the school in a variety of inter-school sports competitions, including in gymnastics, basketball, girls' and boys' football, and a sports event for pupils with SEND.

Governance of the school

- The governing body is working closely with the local authority to bring about improved standards where necessary. As a consequence of close monitoring and effective challenge by the local authority, governors have created a detailed action plan explaining how they will deal with their concerns. Governors are ambitious that the school should continue to improve, and work willingly with the local authority to achieve this.
- Governors know about their school's strengths and weaknesses. They speak knowledgeably about what the school needs to do to improve because they make visits to the school, speaking to pupils and looking at their work.
- Governors make every effort to listen to the views of parents. They know, for example, that some parents have concerns about the impact of the behaviour of a small number of pupils. They have challenged school leaders about this, and are able to explain changes that leaders have made in response to this challenge. Governors' monitoring of the impact of these changes is ongoing.
- Governors rightly acknowledge the caring and supportive ethos of the school. They are concerned about anything that threatens this ethos, such as the lack of leadership of the provision for pupils with SEND, and are able to describe actions that they are taking to solve this problem.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders carry out all necessary checks on staff and volunteers in the school. They ensure that policies are kept up to date, and provide regular training to staff about how to protect pupils from abuse.
- Leaders ensure that procedures are in place to enable staff to report concerns quickly and accurately to those in charge of safeguarding. When interviewed about these procedures, staff spoke with clarity and understanding about how to report safeguarding concerns where necessary.
- Leaders ensure that all safeguarding records are kept securely so that they can be

accessed quickly and easily by safeguarding leads. In a small number of cases, some records were kept in such a way that it was not easy to see what actions had been taken. The school immediately rectified this during the inspection.

- The school works effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils receive support from a range of sources when required.
- The safeguarding governor is new to the role and is conscientiously building her knowledge and expertise in this area.
- A large majority of pupils who responded to the pupil online survey agreed that there is an adult in school whom they can talk to if something is worrying them. In Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, parents agreed that their children feel safe in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent. There are examples of good practice, where teachers' high expectations and secure subject knowledge combine to help pupils to improve their knowledge and understanding. In other instances, however, teaching is not well planned and teachers are not clear about what they want pupils to learn. Where practice is good, processes are not in place to enable it to be shared across the school.
- The accuracy of assessment in English and mathematics has improved, but in some cases the information is not used beneficially to inform planning. Some teachers use their knowledge about pupils' starting points to plan learning that enables pupils to build on what they already know and can do. However, learning time is not always used productively because other teachers' awareness of what pupils can already do lacks precision, and they set tasks that are too easy or too hard. This slows pupils' progress.
- Teaching ensures that pupils benefit from opportunities to consolidate their knowledge, for example, by practising essential mathematical skills or editing and correcting their own writing. Pupils have fewer opportunities, however, to deepen and extend their learning. This is either because teachers' subject knowledge is insecure, or because subject leaders have not ensured that such opportunities are included in the curriculum. For example, there are not enough examples of mathematical reasoning in the key stage 2 curriculum that are carefully planned to take pupils' starting points into account.
- Pupils demonstrate a positive attitude to learning most of the time. When the curriculum is vague, or teachers' subject knowledge is insecure, it is sometimes difficult for pupils to understand what they are meant to be learning. When this happens, pupils sometimes lose focus, and behaviour can become disruptive. When teaching is well planned, and objectives are clear, most pupils listen attentively and are keen to learn.
- The quality of teaching varies between subjects. In some subjects and in some year groups, teaching is thoughtfully planned to support pupils to develop their understanding. In Year 6, for example, pupils spoke enthusiastically about their

knowledge of Tudor monarchs, and used this information to write imaginatively. In other subjects and year groups, however, the curriculum is less well planned, and opportunities for pupils to develop and extend their knowledge and understanding are irregular and lack coherence.

- Teaching assistants show high levels of skill and commitment in the additional support they offer to pupils that they are deployed to work with. The impact of these interventions, however, can be hampered when learning objectives are unclear, and pupils lack the underlying skills to succeed in the task they have been given.
- Phonics skills are well taught in the Reception class and key stage 1. As a result, pupils are skilful in sounding out unfamiliar words, and using their phonic knowledge to incorporate a range of words and phrases in their writing.
- Teachers' expectations of the standard of presentation of their pupils' work are not consistently high. Where presentation is poor and careless, teachers do not routinely challenge pupils to improve.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Most pupils are confident and self-assured in school because they have mutually friendly and respectful relationships with each other and adults. When pupils are speaking in class, other pupils usually listen respectfully and are attentive to each other's views. For example, in an assembly where pupils were discussing possible improvements to the school's anti-bullying policy, pupils took turns to speak and treated each contributor's opinion with consideration.
- Pupils speak highly of the support that they are given at school, particularly in 'The Space', where a trained member of staff supports them with any social or emotional needs.
- Pupils said that the small number of instances of bullying in school are usually dealt with well by staff, although they said that very occasionally this was not the case.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. They were able to describe what the school has taught them about staying safe online. While the school teaches pupils about positive and safe relationships, one pupil said that they would value learning more about sex and relationships education.
- Pupils enjoy the responsibilities that they are given in school, such as learning ambassadors or members of the ethos committee, where pupils plan and lead collective worship. This included a recent assembly that encouraged members of the school community to be accepting of people who are different from them. They also appreciate the cultural and sporting opportunities that they are given to play in sports teams and take part in regular musical concerts and dramatic productions.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Most pupils conduct themselves very well throughout the day in lessons as well as at break- and lunchtime. The school has a friendly atmosphere where almost all pupils play and learn happily together. Classrooms are generally orderly, and most pupils respond well to requests from adults.
- Pupils said that they are sometimes uncomfortable with the behaviour of a small number of pupils that is not always managed well by staff. In their online survey, very few pupils agreed that the behaviour of other pupils in their lessons is good all the time.
- A significant number of parents raised concerns about the behaviour of a small number of pupils in the school. These concerns are well founded. The welfare of some pupils and staff has suffered. This explains the large minority of parental responses on Parent View who would not recommend the school to another parent.
- Overall attendance has improved since the previous inspection. It is stable at around the national average. The proportion of pupils who are persistent non-attenders is below the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

Require improvement

- Pupils do not make strong progress throughout the school in a wide range of subjects. This is because the quality of teaching is not consistently good, and the curriculum is not well planned in every subject.
- Progress is better in key stage 1 than in key stage 2 because pupils transfer from the early years ready to learn having attained a good level of development. It is also because the curriculum is better planned, with activities that successfully build on what pupils already know to develop and extend their learning.
- Most pupils in key stage 2 make better progress in English than in mathematics. This is because teachers are better able to build on pupils' prior knowledge to plan lessons that challenge and engage them.
- While standards in mathematics in key stage 2 are not high enough, the leadership of mathematics is improving. The school is developing a stronger curriculum that supports teachers to continue to improve their subject knowledge and plan lessons that further extend pupils' skills and knowledge. These improvements are beginning to show in pupils' exercise books.
- In subjects other than English and mathematics, such as science, history and geography, pupils in key stage 2 do not generally make good progress. The curriculum varies in quality, and the irregularity and infrequency of some lessons sometimes make it difficult for pupils to build on what they have already learned.
- The good teaching of phonics in early years and key stage 1 helps pupils to read confidently, fluently and with enjoyment throughout the school.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving because leaders have put in place

additional teaching and strategies to support them. Even so, their progress is not yet good because of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching that they receive.

- Some pupils with SEND do not make good progress because the school has been too slow to access additional support to support their individual needs. In spite of this, staff work hard to meet these pupils' needs in school.

Early years provision

Good

- Children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes. They enter with skills broadly typical for their age. By the end of Reception, most children attain a good level of development and some exceed the early learning goals.
- The curriculum in early years is thoughtfully planned to include many well-designed activities that engage children. From the beginning, children are encouraged to take pride in their work, with many attractive examples of children's art and writing displayed on the walls.
- Staff are skilled in supporting children in their learning. They question children thoughtfully to help them to extend their understanding, and support their social skills by engaging them constantly in friendly and cheerful conversation.
- Children are regularly and accurately assessed. This information is used effectively to plan activities that challenge them and help them to make good progress in their learning.
- Staff work closely with other schools to ensure that their professional skills and knowledge are kept up to date. This helps them to develop new ideas to develop children's learning, such as the detailed story maps on the walls showing a range of imaginative writing from a number of different children.
- Careful deployment of attentive staff indoors and in the well-equipped outdoor area ensures that children are safe and well cared for at all times, including when they are working or playing in a group not directly supervised by an adult.
- Well-established routines mean that children listen carefully to staff and follow their instructions. For example, when it was time for a phonics lesson to begin, children took their places and settled down quickly because high expectations of their behaviour are firmly embedded into their daily routine.
- Phonics is well taught in Nursery and Reception classes. Children join key stage 1 with strong reading skills for their age.
- Parents spoke highly of the early years, appreciating its nurturing environment. They value the way the school keeps them informed about their children's performance. The school also provides 'stay and play' sessions for parents, with a recent one providing a focus on phonics.
- Children with SEND are supported well by staff on a daily basis, although insufficient input from leaders is the source of some frustration among staff.

School details

Unique reference number	124774
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10088665

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

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	203
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Linda Berry
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	28–29 March 2017

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average primary school, with one class in each year group.
- This school is designated as having a religious character. The last section 48 inspection took place on 19 October 2016.
- Almost all pupils are from a White British background.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is smaller than the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited all classrooms. Some visits were conducted jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and middle leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), the designated safeguarding lead, the early years leader and subject leaders.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body and other members of the governing body.
- The lead inspector met with a representative of the local authority.
- The lead inspector met with a group of teachers and other staff members.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils. They also spoke to pupils in their lessons and around the school at breaktime and lunchtime.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in their exercise books.
- Inspectors examined a range of documents including: self-evaluation and improvement plans; local authority letters and monitoring documents; records of the monitoring of teaching and learning; the school's assessment tracking records; records of the provision for pupils with SEND; safeguarding records (including the single central record); behaviour records and attendance records.
- Inspectors considered 37 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 26 free-text responses. They also considered 18 responses to the staff survey and 55 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Richard Hopkins, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Lesley Stevens

Ofsted Inspector

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