

Inspection of a good school: Marden Primary School

Goudhurst Road, Marden, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 9JX

Inspection dates: 15–16 October 2019

Outcome

Marden Primary School continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Marden Primary is a calm, friendly school with a positive atmosphere. Pupils are happy and enjoy their lessons. They work hard and want to learn new things. Pupils are proud of the special experiences that the school offers. These include the chance to care for rabbits and guinea pigs. Pupils also benefit from the quiet and beautiful 'secret garden' in the school's grounds.

Parents and carers are happy that their children attend this school. One parent commented, 'I am constantly impressed at the range of extra-curricular activities put on for the children, including stargazing, sports and film nights.'

Pupils behave well. They are safe and well looked after. Leaders do not tolerate bullying. Pupils of all ages are encouraged to work and play together. They treat each other, and their teachers, with respect. Older pupils are house captains. They look after younger pupils at playtimes and lunchtimes. Pupils learn together well in mixed-age classes.

Sometimes teachers do not expect enough from pupils and children. Sometimes pupils and children find the work too easy because teachers set tasks that are not sufficiently challenging. When this happens, they do not achieve as well as they could. This is particularly the case in key stage 1 and early years.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Senior leaders have recently made some positive changes to curriculum plans. These are now stronger, for example they show how topics are linked together by themes. The plans cater well for the learning needs of different groups. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They also benefit from effective one-to-one support. Leaders have not made sure that these plans are well implemented across all subjects and year groups, especially in key stage 1 and early years. By the end of Year 2, pupils do not do as well as they should. They achieve more highly by the end of Year 6.

Teaching, especially in the early years and key stage 1, does not deepen pupils' subject knowledge and skills. For example, key stage 1 pupils have not mastered important subject-related vocabulary in mathematics. This means that they cannot answer the questions teachers ask them. Children get accustomed to routines in Reception classes quickly. However, teaching does not enable children to make strides in their learning in all areas. Children do not always get the best start to their education.

Although some aspects of reading are strong, leaders have not ensured that the teaching of reading is effective across the school. Last year, leaders introduced a new approach to phonics. This helped to increase the number of pupils who reached the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check. However, teaching does not deepen pupils' reading skills and knowledge as they move from early years through key stage 1. For instance, the books children and pupils read are not well enough matched to the letters and sounds they are learning. In key stage 2, teachers introduce pupils to an increasingly wide range of good-quality literature. They do not always ensure that pupils fully understand the themes in the books and the methods writers use to present them.

Pupils are keen to find out new information and learn about the world. In key stage 2, teachers ensure that new learning is introduced in exciting ways. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 enjoyed learning about Alfred the Great through taking part in a drama workshop. Other pupils spoke of the new knowledge they had gained in science about the body's circulatory system. One pupil commented, 'It is fascinating, interesting and helpful; I didn't know before just how the body works.'

Pupils are motivated and try hard. They behave well in lessons and around school. They respond positively when teachers remind them about the school's high expectations of their behaviour.

Pupils enjoy the extra activities which the school provides. These include clubs, trips and visitors to the school. The school's values, and the literature pupils study, help them to consider local, national and global issues. They develop empathy, as well as acceptance of differences.

Teachers with leadership roles have a clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses in the areas they manage. Some have strong subject expertise. However, for a number, this aspect of their role is not developed well enough. Staff are proud to be part of the school. They appreciate senior leaders' attentiveness to their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff know the pupils well and can quickly spot any problems. They know how to report any concerns and are vigilant in doing so. Staff are well trained in safeguarding issues. Leaders work closely with external agencies so that pupils receive timely and appropriate help.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They learn how to keep themselves safe and know whom to turn to if they have any problems. They trust adults in school and are confident

that any issues would be sorted out quickly and fairly. Parents agree that 'the school provides a safe and caring environment for learning.'

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders and teachers should ensure that the curriculum in key stage 1 and in early years is implemented better. They should make sure that children and pupils gain strong subject-specific knowledge and skills, which they can apply and deepen over time.
- Reading needs to develop across the school. In key stage 1 and in early years, books should be more closely matched to the sounds and letters that pupils are learning. In key stage 2, teaching needs to ensure that pupils understand the complex ideas in the books they read and the techniques writers use to convey these ideas.
- Some subject and phase leaders need to enhance their expertise and their knowledge of the curriculum so that they can better support and challenge teachers.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 10 March 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	118306
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10111336
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	274
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Mr Andrew Puncher and Mr James Sawle (co-chairs)
Headteacher	Ms Tracy Thomas
Website	www.marden.kent.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	9–10 March 2016

Information about this school

- The school is organised into mixed-aged classes. There are three classes in each of the phases, Year 1/2, Year 3/4 and Year 5/6. There are two Reception Year classes.
- The headteacher was appointed in April 2018.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers and other leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator.
- She also met with the co-chairs of the governing body. A meeting was held with an improvement adviser from the local authority.
- The inspector looked in depth at reading, mathematics and science. For each of these three subjects she spoke to senior leaders, curriculum leaders, teachers and pupils, visited lessons and looked at pupils' work.
- To inspect safeguarding, the inspector spoke to the designated safeguarding leader and the deputies, checked the single central record, looked at the responses to the parent and staff surveys and observed and spoke to pupils.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school and asked

pupils for their views on behaviour and bullying.

Inspection team

Margaret Coussins, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
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