School report

Twydall Primary School and Nursery
Twydall Lane, Gillingham, Kent ME8 6JS

Inspection dates
6–7 June 2018

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Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Historic weak teaching and many fluctuations in teaching arrangements have disrupted pupils’ learning and led to too many pupils making very slow progress over time.
- While there are some strengths in teaching, too much teaching is not securely good to enable pupils to make rapid progress and make up for lost ground. Some teachers do not have high enough expectations, including of the most able pupils.
- In mathematics, there are too few opportunities for pupils to solve problems and develop their reasoning.
- Leaders’ evaluations and improvement plans lack precision.
- Some parents express concern about leaders’ communication with them and the way that concerns are dealt with.
- Children in early years do not make strong enough progress in all aspects of their learning.

The school has the following strengths

- The acting headteacher has brought stability to the school. She has introduced many positive changes and improvements are under way.
- Safeguarding is effective. Most pupils behave well and relationships are positive.
- Some teachers’ assessments of pupils’ achievement are too generous. Leaders do not have a clear enough understanding of the progress that all groups of pupils are making.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to write at length. Weaknesses in pupils’ writing persist because these are not systematically addressed by teachers.
- The curriculum is not well planned. Pupils do not develop their skills and knowledge sufficiently well in some subjects, such as history and science.
- Many subject and middle leaders are new to their role and they do not yet have a clear oversight of standards.
- Over time, governors and trustees have not held leaders to account sufficiently.
- Exclusions and rates of absence are well above the national average.

- Pupils are developing appropriate calculation skills. Standards of reading are improving.
- Pupils who have complex physical and medical needs are supported and cared for well.
Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school has serious weaknesses because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

■ Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that it is consistently good, in order to improve outcomes for pupils by ensuring that:
  – teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils’ achievement in all subjects and plan learning that offers sufficient challenge and meets the needs of all groups of pupils
  – teachers consistently apply the school’s marking policy and more systematically address weaknesses in pupils’ writing
  – pupils are given more opportunities to write at length and apply their skills in a range of different subjects across the curriculum
  – teachers plan more regular opportunities in mathematics for pupils to develop their reasoning skills and solve problems.

■ Sustain improvements in pupils’ behaviour and continue to reduce the number of exclusions.

■ Improve attendance and reduce rates of persistent absence.

■ Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
  – leaders sharpen and refine their evaluations and improvement plans, including the use of additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils
  – leaders embed the school’s new assessment system, keep a closer track on the progress of all groups of pupils and ensure that teachers’ assessments are accurate
  – leaders develop the role of the new middle and subject leaders, so that they play a greater role in improving standards
  – the curriculum is planned more rigorously so that pupils can develop their skills, knowledge and understanding more effectively in all subjects
  – trustees implement their plans, including the recommended actions from the external review, to strengthen governance, so that governors can more effectively hold leaders to account
  – leaders continue to strengthen communication with parents and carers.

An external review of the school’s use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Following the school’s conversion to academy status in 2016, the school declined further. Fragilities and turbulence in leadership and staffing have hampered school improvement. Improvements have only just got under way since the appointment of the acting headteacher in January 2018. She has brought a new sense of purpose and direction to the school and has harnessed the support of the staff. There are positive green shoots of recovery. However, many of the acting headteacher’s well-judged changes are still in their infancy and are not yet fully embedded.

- Until recently, leaders had not ensured that the additional funding the school receives for disadvantaged pupils is used to support these pupils. While leaders are now making sure that this money is being used appropriately, they have not yet evaluated the impact of their work to support these pupils. As a result, they do not know what strategies are making the most difference to pupils’ learning.

- A new system of assessment was introduced earlier this year and is still being established. Currently, leaders do not have a clear enough understanding of the attainment or progress of different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

- Leaders’ evaluation of the school is not accurate, including of the quality of teaching. Although leaders understand that teaching needs to improve, the school development plan is not focused enough on the specific aspects of teaching that are weakest.

- Many middle leaders are new to their post and relatively inexperienced. Subject leadership is at an early stage of development. Subject leaders do not currently have oversight of the standards, progress and quality of teaching in their subjects across the school. Therefore, they do not know how well pupils are learning in their areas of responsibility. Nevertheless, some are knowledgeable about their subjects, providing support and guidance and sharing their expertise with colleagues. Leaders are wisely drawing on a wide range of external support to strengthen leadership capacity at the school.

- The assistant special educational needs coordinator, who has overall responsibility for pupils’ progress and additional support in the school, is new to role. Therefore, it is too soon to see the impact of the recent improvements she has introduced. Leaders have ensured that funding for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is used appropriately to support these pupils. A significant number of additional adults provide sensitive, caring support for pupils who have complex medical and physical needs in the school’s additional provision. These pupils are integrated appropriately into the school and are supported well. However, the evaluation of the support and outcomes for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is at an early stage of development.

- Pupils’ learning in the wider curriculum is not planned well. There are few opportunities for pupils to learn in sufficient depth. In key stage 2, over time, pupils do not develop and build on their skills, knowledge and understanding. In subjects such as history, pupils typically complete identical tasks, irrespective of their abilities. The design of many of these activities limits pupils’ learning. Scrutiny of lower key stage 2 pupils’ work in science shows a similar picture. As a consequence, pupils’ learning in the wider
curriculum is superficial and standards are low in some subjects. Many key stage 2 pupils’ topic books show a lack of pride in presentation.

- Pupils’ enjoyment and interest in subjects are enhanced through visits to places of interest and other enrichment activities. Older pupils also benefit from the opportunity to take part in a residential visit. Extra-curricular activities, such as sports and music clubs, contribute well to pupils’ enjoyment of school. These opportunities also enable pupils to develop their sports skills by, for example, playing in a team.

- Pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is catered for well. Pupils learn about important values such as valuing difference. As one pupil commented, ‘We are all special in different ways.’ In religious education, pupils learn about different faiths and beliefs. They enjoy taking on responsibilities, such as being a school councillor, and explain how the school council has helped to improve the school environment. Other pupils enjoy being prefects and helping to care for and support other pupils. Pupils appreciate the rewards and celebrations of their achievements, for example during assembly times.

- Since the arrival of the acting headteacher, the school has been able to embark on its journey of improvement. The acting headteacher is enthusiastic and keen to improve the school. Aspirations have been raised. Staff talk positively about the school being a happier place, and say that leaders support them well. Staff also benefit from training and support from the multi-academy trust (MAT) and other external partners.

- Leaders carry out regular informal visits to classrooms and provide feedback to individual teachers to help them improve their skills. Leaders have improved the school environment, which is now attractive, well organised and orderly. Pupils’ behaviour has improved and standards are beginning to rise.

- The majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, are positive about many aspects of the school. They say that their children feel safe and enjoy school. However, parents’ views about the leadership of the school are more mixed. While some parents note the positive improvements made by the new leadership, others are less complimentary about the school. A number of parents are unhappy about the way the leaders communicate with them and feel that their concerns are not dealt with well enough.

**Governance of the school**

- Governors and trustees from the MAT are now beginning to hold leaders to account more fully. However, until recently, they have not made sure that the funding for disadvantaged pupils is used appropriately to support these pupils.

- The MAT has increased its scrutiny following the difficulties caused by the inaccurate assessment information leaders gave it in 2017. It had previously not routinely ensured that there was sufficient external verification of information given to it by leaders. The MAT now has external partners to help governors and trustees be more assured of the accuracy of the information it receives.

- The MAT is poised to provide greater support and guidance to leaders so that their evaluations and improvement plans are sharpened. It acknowledges that, currently, there are weaknesses in this aspect of leaders’ work.
The MAT has recognised the need to strengthen the effectiveness of the local governing body. Improvements to governance have just begun to take shape. The MAT has recently reviewed the committee structure, conducted a skills audit and appointed a new chair of governors in order to strengthen governance. Governors are now being supported to provide greater challenge to leaders.

The MAT has brokered a wide range of additional support for the school, including support from external consultants and leaders from other schools. Trustees and governors have ensured that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place and that these are fit for purpose.

**Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff and leaders have received appropriate training and are knowledgeable about their responsibilities and how to respond if they have a concern.

- The school’s record keeping, including the checks made on new members of staff on appointment, is compliant. Leaders have implemented effective systems so that any concerns about pupils are suitably logged and referred, where appropriate, to other agencies. They make sure that pupils and families receive the support they need to keep safe. They also challenge the local authority’s social care team if they believe action is not being taken swiftly enough to support pupils.

- The school has a strong relationship with the local authority safeguarding officer, who has conducted an independent audit of safeguarding. This provided reassurance to leaders, trustees and governors of the good quality of their safeguarding arrangements and also identified where these could be improved. For example, leaders have refined the way they record any concerns and have also introduced different coloured lanyards to identify staff, visitors and contractors.

- Pupils say that the school helps them to stay safe by teaching them about how to keep safe online, for example by not communicating with people they don’t know and not sharing personal information. The majority of parents say that their children feel safe at school.

**Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

- A legacy of poor teaching and high staff turnover has disrupted pupils’ learning. Over time, this led to pupils making weak progress and not achieving as well as they could. Although improving and now more stable, the quality of teaching still has considerable weaknesses overall. This means that some pupils are not making rapid enough progress to compensate for lost ground. This is particularly the case for low-attaining pupils, those who have SEN and/or disabilities, and disadvantaged pupils.

- In some classes, teachers’ expectations, particularly in the wider curriculum, are too low and teaching lacks challenge. In some subjects, teachers provide pupils of all abilities with similar work. Many tasks restrict the opportunities for pupils to learn in depth and frequently demand limited answers. When this happens, the most able pupils, in particular, are not challenged.
The quality of teachers’ questioning is very variable. In some classes, teachers ask challenging questions which probe pupils’ understanding and build on their prior learning. However, this practice is not well established across the school.

The school’s assessment system is still being refined, having only recently been introduced. Not all teachers follow the school’s marking policy. As a result, sometimes poor-quality work goes unchecked and errors in pupils’ grammar, punctuation and spelling persist. During the inspection, samples of pupils’ work showed that some teachers’ assessments are too generous.

Teachers do not give pupils enough opportunities to write at length in a range of genres and subjects. This means that pupils do not get enough practice in applying their writing skills.

The teaching of phonics is not consistently good. While there is some strong teaching in key stage 1, this is not consistent. Some teaching does not take account of pupils’ prior learning. The pitch and expectations for pupils are sometimes too low and the most able pupils are not building sufficiently on the phonics skills they have acquired in early years.

There is a consistent approach to the teaching of calculation. Teachers ensure that pupils have plenty of practice and opportunity to develop their calculation skills. They have established clear expectations that help pupils to set out their work systematically. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their reasoning and apply their skills to solve problems. In some classes, pupils are required to repeat too many calculations of a similar level of difficulty.

Teachers do not give sufficient attention to how pupils write their numbers, particularly in key stage 1. Some low-attaining pupils’ weak number formation results in them making errors when they calculate or try to make sense of what they have written.

Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are supported well by teaching assistants. This helps pupils to keep focused in lessons. Teaching assistants use a range of practical resources to help pupils develop basic concepts such as addition. However, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are not making good progress over time and some are making very slow progress.

There are some pockets of stronger practice in the school, where teachers engage pupils well, and challenge them appropriately. Some teachers have higher expectations, explain new learning well and model writing to pupils to help them develop their skills. Across the school, relationships between adults and pupils are warm.

The school’s new approach to reading is having a positive effect on pupils’ enjoyment of, and motivation to read. Regular reading times have been established and this is leading to pupils making much better progress in reading.
Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The school’s work to promote pupils’ personal development and welfare requires improvement.

Pupils enjoy school and feel safe and well supported by their teachers. However, they say that they are sometimes unsettled by the angry behaviour of a small number of pupils.

Pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities, such as being a school councillor, and explain how the school council has helped to improve the school environment. Other pupils enjoy helping to care for and support other pupils, particularly those who have additional needs. The ‘daily mile’ is encouraging pupils to keep active during lunchtime and develop a healthy lifestyle.

Pupils understand the school’s values and explain that these help them to know that they need to work hard to be successful in life. Most pupils have positive attitudes to school. However, in key stage 2, pupils’ work in some subjects in the wider curriculum shows a lack of pride.

There continues to be a high number of alleged bullying incidents. Although only a third of these were substantiated, there are still too many. Some parents express concern that the school does not deal effectively with incidents of bullying. The school’s records show that any incidents are fully investigated and dealt with well. Pupils appreciate the work of the school’s anti-bullying ambassadors.

Behaviour

The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.

During this school year, there has been a significant rise in the number of exclusions. Although this has declined substantially since January, the proportion of pupils excluded during this school year is very high and well above the national average. Pupils report that their learning is sometimes disturbed by the behaviour of a few pupils. Nevertheless, behaviour overall has improved considerably and leaders have introduced new and effective systems to manage pupils’ behaviour.

Attendance for pupils is consistently low and has declined from the previous year. Persistent absence is more than double the national average and has risen considerably from the previous year. However, some pupils have high levels of absence due to chronic medical conditions. Disadvantaged pupils’ attendance is well below the national average and is not showing signs of improvement.

Leaders are working very hard to improve attendance. The school’s new attendance officer follows up stringently any absence or punctuality concerns. Leaders have implemented a comprehensive range of strategies to secure improvement. However, it is too soon to see the impact of their work.

During the inspection, most pupils behaved sensibly in class and when moving around the school. The majority are respectful and courteous to one another and to their
teachers. However, where teaching lacks challenge and does not match pupils’ needs, some pupils lose interest, do not focus on their learning and disengage.

**Outcomes for pupils**

- In 2017, the standards achieved by pupils by the end of key stage 2 declined significantly to below the government’s minimum expectations. Pupils’ progress was significantly below the national average in reading and mathematics, and only a third of pupils achieved the expected standards. This means that the majority of pupils did not have the appropriate knowledge and understanding required for secondary school. In contrast, attainment at the end of key stage 1 was broadly average.

- The significant changes of staff and historic poor teaching have contributed to pupils’ underachievement. While pupils are now making better progress because of improved teaching, they are not making strong enough progress to compensate for historic weaker teaching. Many have gaps in their learning, particularly low-attaining pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. As the acting headteacher explained, ‘We are playing catch-up.’

- In 2017, few disadvantaged pupils attained the expected standards at the end of key stage 2. The progress of these pupils was affected by high levels of staff absence and because some interventions for them did not take place as planned. Disadvantaged pupils’ progress remains uneven, and too few of these pupils attain the expected standards for their age.

- In key stage 1, a very low proportion of the most able pupils are working at the higher standards, particularly in writing. During the inspection, very few examples were seen of pupils’ writing that showed greater depth. In key stage 2, the school’s assessment information shows that increasing numbers of pupils are working at the higher standards. However, some work sampled during the inspection shows that teachers’ assessments are not consistently accurate.

- Pupils’ writing in some year groups is of poor quality and their grammar, punctuation, spelling and handwriting are not well developed. Pupils are not able to develop their writing well enough because they have too few opportunities to write at length.

- In the wider curriculum, key stage 2 pupils do not make strong enough progress because they do not develop their knowledge and understanding across the full range of subjects. Tasks are often limiting and learning is superficial.

- In mathematics, pupils are making appropriate progress in their mathematical calculation skills. Regular opportunities to practise calculations, including tables, are helping to develop pupils’ fluency and confidence. However, the limited opportunities pupils have to develop reasoning and solve problems mean that they are not developing sufficient depth to their learning.

- The school’s new approach to reading is having a positive impact. Pupils are developing much better reading habits and enjoy the new books that the school has purchased. As a result, many pupils are making good progress in their reading. Nevertheless, the variability in the teaching of phonics in key stage 1 means that some pupils are not achieving as well as they could in this aspect of their learning.
Stronger and more settled teaching arrangements have enabled the current Year 6 pupils to make good progress this year. The school expects there to be an uplift in the results at the end of key stage 2 in 2018. The proportion of pupils on track to achieve the expected standards for their age in other year groups is improving. However, fragilities in teaching and changes of staff mean that this improvement is not yet secured throughout the school.

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**Early years provision**

- Fluctuations in staff and some weaknesses in teaching have led to children not making consistently strong progress in all aspects of their learning in Reception. A lower proportion of children are expected to achieve the expected ‘good level of development’ than in the previous year. This is mainly because of the slow progress children have made in their writing skills. However, the overall quality of provision in early years is stronger than it is in key stages 1 and 2.

- Many disadvantaged children arrive with skills that are below those that are typical for their age. These children are not yet making rapid enough progress to catch up. The most able children are making good progress and some are making accelerated progress.

- Children’s writing in early years is not well developed. Children’s independent writing books sampled by inspectors show that many children are still at a very early stage of writing. There are too few opportunities for children to write independently and the quality of their writing is contributing to their lower than expected standards.

- Leaders have recognised the weaknesses in children’s writing and have adjusted provision to include daily adult-led writing activities for children. As a result, more children are now writing more regularly and developing a better understanding of sentence structure. However, children’s incorrect pencil grip and inaccurate letter formation are not consistently addressed by adults.

- Reading and phonics are taught well in early years. Adults accurately model the sounds that letters represent. They use their assessments of children’s learning to adjust activities, so that they are pitched appropriately to meet children’s needs and offer a suitable level of challenge. Children achieve well and apply their skills when reading.

- Leaders have, rightly, recognised that when children arrive in early years, many do not have good spoken language skills. In Nursery and Reception, adults take every opportunity to model language and draw children into conversation. Leaders have recently introduced more story-telling opportunities to develop children’s language and speaking skills.

- Across early years, the learning environment and good relationships are enabling children to develop the characteristics of effective learning. Children show interest and curiosity in the world around them. As one child commented, when examining a seed pod through a magnifying glass, ‘It’s got a spiky bit!’ The spacious outdoor area, in particular, is well resourced and there is plenty to interest and engage children. Most children settle well to learning activities and many persevere and concentrate to achieve success with their learning.
- Children are settled and play happily because their personal, social and emotional needs are catered for well. Adults model good behaviour and encourage children to show good manners, share equipment and take turns. Safeguarding is effective and adults attend suitably to children’s welfare needs. Children’s settled and happy start enables them to be socially well prepared for Year 1.

- Leaders draw on expertise from other staff and they work well as a team. They have made good use of the external support from the local authority to continue to improve the setting. Leaders acknowledge that, currently, they are not confident in the accuracy of assessment information.

- The partnership with parents is good and parents hold positive views about early years and the happy start their children make to school.
School details

| Unique reference number       | 142393       |
| Local authority              | Medway       |
| Inspection number            | 10047075     |

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

| Type of school                | Primary       |
| School category              | Academy sponsor-led |
| Age range of pupils          | 3 to 11       |
| Gender of pupils             | Mixed         |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 527         |
| Appropriate authority        | Board of trustees |
| Chair of the local governing body | Reverend Ann Richardson |
| Acting Headteacher           | Catherine Logan |
| Telephone number             | 01634 231761  |
| Website                      | twydallprimary.org.uk |
| Email address                | office@twydallprimary.org.uk |
| Date of previous inspection  | Not previously inspected |

Information about this school

- The school did not meet the government’s current floor standards in 2017. These are the minimum expectations for pupils’ attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6.

- The school converted to academy status in February 2016 and joined the Rainham Mark Academy Trust. The school is sponsored by Rainham Mark Grammar School. There is one other primary school in the trust.

- The school is led by an acting headteacher who has been in post since January 2018. The previous substantive headteacher left the school in December 2017. The acting headteacher was initially seconded to the school from Rainham Mark Grammar School during October 2017, to support the school during the extended illness of the previous headteacher.

- Since the school became an academy, there have been many changes of staff. Many new staff joined the school in September, including five newly qualified teachers. Three
classes are currently taught by trainee teachers. There have been further changes of teachers during this school year.

- The school has its own governing body that is accountable to the board of trustees. The current chair of governors was appointed at the end of May 2018. There are currently three vacancies on the governing body.

- In addition to support from the sponsor school, the school receives support from Brompton-Westbrook Primary School, Bradfields Academy and the local authority early years team. An external consultant is currently providing support to the school with assessment, and a national leader of education is providing support for new phase leaders.

- The school has additionally resourced provision for pupils who have physical disabilities and medical needs. The school has provision for a small number of pupils who have hearing impairment.

- There is a breakfast club, which is run by the school. An after-school club and additional breakfast club are run by a private company, which has separate Ofsted registration.

- This is the first inspection of the school since it became an academy in February 2016. The predecessor school was judged to be inadequate in March 2014.
**Information about this inspection**

- Inspectors observed learning in all classes except Year 6 as the majority of pupils were not in school because they were attending a residential visit. During most visits to classes, inspectors were accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team. Inspectors talked with pupils about their learning and looked at work in pupils’ books. Inspectors held separate meetings with leaders to review the quality of pupils’ work.

- Inspectors also observed two assemblies. Inspectors listened to pupils read and met with a group of pupils from Years 1 to 6.

- Inspectors observed pupils’ behaviour in classrooms, during breaktime and lunchtime, and as they moved around the school.

- Meetings were held with senior leaders, phase leaders and other teachers. The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the MAT and the chair of the local governing body.

- Inspectors met with parents at the start of the first day of the inspection. Inspectors took into account the 82 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the accompanying free-text comments.

- The views of staff were gathered through discussions with them and through the 51 responses to Ofsted’s confidential staff survey.

- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documents and policies, including records of pupils’ attendance and behaviour. Inspectors reviewed other school documents, including: safeguarding documents; the school development plan; leaders’ self-evaluation; policies; records of leaders’ observations of teaching; and minutes of meetings.

**Inspection team**

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<th>Sue Cox, lead inspector</th>
<th>Her Majesty’s Inspector</th>
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<td>Frances Robinson</td>
<td>Ofsted Inspector</td>
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<td>Helen Tait</td>
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