

Inspection of a good school: Hilltop Primary Academy

Hilltop Road, Frindsbury, Rochester, Kent ME2 4QN

Inspection dates:

28 and 29 June 2022

Outcome

Hilltop Primary Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils believe that Hilltop is a great school. The values embodied in the school's 'RECIPE' acronym ('respect, excellence, co-operation, independence, perseverance and enjoyment') are threaded through everything the school does. Pupils are quick to talk about many of the activities provided for them. These included 'Muddy Madness', 'Rainbow Day', trips out to local attractions and the many clubs. Pupils enjoy a wide range of assemblies which support them in gaining skills for life and also celebrate their achievements.

Pupils feel they are safe at Hilltop. Behaviour at the school is good and bullying is rare. Pupils are polite and respectful to their peers and adults. Those pupils who need help to meet behavioural expectations are supported sensitively and their needs are met.

Pupils are keen to learn because the curriculum is well designed and is generally well delivered across the school. Pupils rise to teachers' and leaders' high expectations and believe they learn well because 'adults explain things clearly' and 'praise you when you do well'.

Parents and carers are positive about the school although some would value better communication. Pupils and staff value their time at Hilltop and the care they are given. They feel their voices are heard. They are treated as individuals and believe 'we all count'.

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

The well-sequenced curriculum at Hilltop Primary Academy has been carefully designed. It is ambitious for all and many pupils have accurate recall of previous learning. Those pupils who require support are given it in the form of additional resources, adult help or changes to the activity. Throughout the school, lessons build upon pupils' previous learning and experiences. For example, pupils' sketchbooks show a clear progression from experimenting with mark making to developing a good understanding of proportion and scale.

The curriculum leader has a robust understanding of all the foundation subjects. She is rigorous in checking leaders' work and monitoring progress. She holds subject leaders to account and offers help and advice. Subject Leaders are quick to support teachers with their subject knowledge and use of assessment to identify next steps in learning.

Reading and literacy is placed at the core of the curriculum. Teachers and teaching assistants ensure that pupils are enthusiastic and engaged in lessons and pupils quickly learn to read with fluency. Those pupils who struggle with reading are supported to improve their reading ability and to catch up with their peers. Pupils develop a love of reading early on and the majority see themselves as 'readers'. Older pupils welcome the opportunity to read longer books.

There are effective processes in place to identify pupils who are falling behind. Teachers are quick to seek advice and work closely with the special educational needs coordinator and outside agencies to adapt the curriculum. Pupils are supported skilfully and sensitively to achieve the best possible outcomes. Pupils are also provided with opportunities to develop their independence and perseverance.

The early years leader has an excellent understanding of the curriculum and how this underpins future learning. With her team, she has created an inspiring environment that provides many opportunities for exploration and discovery. Children are keen to share their learning. For example, they use advanced vocabulary to describe the process of growing and tending plants and make references to storybooks and non-fiction books. Children leave early years as curious and enthusiastic individuals who are eager to learn.

School leaders are supported by a skilled local governing body. Governors recognise that monitoring and evaluation has been difficult due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, they have recently been able to return to school and are beginning to pick up the pace by working closely with leaders in actively monitoring the school and the curriculum. Governors and the headteacher are ambitious for the school and positive about future changes. They value staff and recognise the importance of development opportunities and other initiatives to support retention and well-being.

Across the school there are clear routines in place and high expectations regarding behaviour. Pupils report that behaviour is good and they have an understanding of the behaviour charts, rewards and consequences. Any instances of low-level disruption are addressed promptly by staff.

Leaders plan carefully for pupils' wider development. A range of clubs and activities, including day trips and visitors to the school, take this development beyond the curriculum. The values embodied in the trust wide 'RECIPE' acronym are firmly embedded within the school experience and ensure pupils leave Hilltop as well-rounded individuals with skills for life.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils at Hilltop know how to keep themselves safe, including online. The well-trained designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) have a good understanding of local issues and safeguarding needs within the school. When required, appropriate external agencies are contacted to secure help for individual pupils and their families. Leaders ensure that any referrals are followed up and appropriate action is taken to protect pupils in their care.

The appropriate checks on adults are completed by the trust. Staff are well supported by DSLs. Adults in school are quick to seek advice and are supported emotionally. Governors have a good understanding of the safeguarding procedures within the school

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The sequential and well-thought-out curriculum intentions are not consistently implemented across all classes. Leaders should continue to ensure that the strong intentions of the curriculum are implemented with consistency across the school in order that all pupils are given the opportunity to achieve well.

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 or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, 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 deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Hilltop Primary School to be good in February 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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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 the school and 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	145440
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10227008
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	421
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Sarah Weeden-Arter
Headteacher	Mr Gavin Evans
Website	http://www.sflt.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Hilltop Primary School academised in January 2018 and joined the Skills for Life Trust. It was renamed Hilltop Primary Academy.
- The headteacher, at the time of inspection, is the head of primary education for the trust and is acting headteacher at Hilltop Primary Academy.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first inspection since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and has taken that into account in her evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the school leaders, different subject leaders and a range of staff and pupils.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and art. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector met with representatives from the local governing body, including the chair of governors. She also met with the chief executive officer of the Skills for Life Trust.

- The school's safeguarding arrangements were reviewed. This included safer recruitment checks and scrutiny of record-keeping, as well as speaking to pupils and staff.
- The inspector also reviewed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and school development plan and information about the school's curriculum.
- The inspector took into account responses from Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. In addition, responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys were considered. The inspector also considered the views of pupils by speaking to them throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Tracy Good, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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