

Inspection of a good school: Great Totham Primary School

Walden House Road, Great Totham, Maldon, Essex CM9 8PN

Inspection dates: 25 and 26 April 2023

Outcome

Great Totham Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy being a part of this welcoming school community. All staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils work very hard in lessons to do their best. They achieve well across the curriculum. Pupils enjoy the way teachers challenge them. They also like the way staff help them when they find work difficult. Pupils appreciate teachers and teaching assistants taking the time to go back over information they have not fully understood.

Pupils behave exceptionally well throughout the school day. They are kind and courteous towards each other during breaktimes and in before- and after-school care. Bullying is very rare. If it happens, pupils know that staff will deal with it quickly so that it does not happen again. Pupils are happy and safe at school.

Pupils understand the importance of the school values of 'enjoy, respect, achieve'. They know what these values mean and demonstrate them throughout the school day. Opportunities to represent the school at a range of sporting events inspires pupils to challenge themselves during physical education (PE) lessons. Pupils are proud to take part in sporting competitions, such as cross-country and tag rugby.

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

Leaders have created a curriculum that identifies clearly the important content that they want pupils to learn from Reception to Year 6. In most curriculum areas, they have also identified the detail and order of the key knowledge and skills that pupils need to secure this learning over time. Leaders have started to refine some of the curriculum areas where this detail is not in place. Where this work is completed, pupils learn what they need to know and remember effectively. However, in the few areas where the curriculum remains less precisely defined, pupils do not always secure the knowledge that they need to achieve as well as leaders would like.

Leaders have provided training for staff on how to teach the curriculum. Overall, staff teach the curriculum well. They carefully check pupils' understanding of what they have learned, to identify pupils with misconceptions. Teachers and teaching assistants then go back over these misconceptions to help pupils to secure their understanding. Teachers adapt curriculum plans effectively. This includes in the early years, where teachers react skilfully to their checks on children's learning to plan activities and provision that support children to achieve well. A sharp focus on language development and vocabulary in Reception, for example, helps children to access other areas of the early years curriculum.

Reading is the cornerstone of the curriculum. Leaders have recently introduced a new approach to the teaching of phonics. The impact of this new approach is monitored carefully by leaders, including those responsible for governance. Well-trained staff support pupils in the early stages of reading. Children in Reception learn to blend sounds together to read and spell with accuracy. Leaders identify any pupil quickly who is struggling to read. These pupils then receive high-quality support to help them develop their fluency and their confidence. Older pupils love reading. They especially enjoy reading and listening to stories from a range of authors.

Leaders ensure that support plans for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) provide staff with the information they need to support these pupils effectively. Careful adaptations to the curriculum, such as focused fluency sessions in mathematics, help pupils with SEND to achieve well.

The curriculum teaches pupils about individual differences. Pupils understand terms such as 'prejudice' and why these views are wrong. They enjoy learning about different religions and cultures during religious education lessons. They understand the importance of tolerance and respect. As a result, pupils celebrate individual differences. They are respectful of staff and of each other. Pupils listen carefully to staff and so pupils' behaviour during lessons is of a high quality. This helps everyone to concentrate and to learn effectively.

Governors check how well the school is performing. They carefully monitor the impact of new initiatives that leaders introduce. Leaders help staff to manage their workload. Staff feel well supported by leaders and by each other. They are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide staff with regular training and information on how to keep pupils safe. Staff understand how to identify and raise concerns that a pupil may be at risk of harm. They raise concerns quickly and consistently using the school's agreed reporting procedures. Leaders respond to these concerns in a timely manner. Where required, leaders provide additional support for pupils and families, both within school and through seeking help from other professionals. The 'life-skills' curriculum teaches pupils how to keep safe, including when they are online. As a result, pupils have a secure understanding of how to manage risks. They know there are adults in school they can talk to if they have any worries.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few areas of the curriculum, plans do not identify precisely the details, or order of, key knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn and remember to achieve what leaders want them to. This means there are occasions when pupils do not build new learning on secure foundations of the knowledge that they should already know. Leaders must complete their ongoing work to identify the additional detail of what pupils need to learn, and the order they need to learn it in, quickly. This is so that pupils achieve consistently well in all aspects of the planned provision.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in January 2013.

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.

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	115244
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10268634
Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	426
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	John Gilbert
Headteacher	Sarah Vass
Website	www.greattotham.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There is a breakfast and after-school club run by school staff for pupils.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and PE. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Curriculum plans and examples of work were considered in art, personal social and health education and the early years foundation stage. The inspector also listened to pupils read with a familiar member of staff.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector scrutinised safeguarding policies, the school's record of background checks of adults at the school and a sample of child protection files. He also spoke with governors, the designated safeguarding lead, a deputy designated safeguarding lead, and staff about safeguarding practices at the school.

- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders and curriculum teams, staff, governors, a representative from the local authority and pupils.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documents, including behaviour logs, bullying records, pupils' records, minutes of governing body meetings, school improvement visit notes from the local authority, school improvement plans and school policies.
- There were 86 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View, which were considered. The inspector also considered written correspondence received during the inspection.
- There were 110 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils. The inspector also spoke with pupils throughout the inspection to gather their views.
- The 29 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for school staff were considered. The inspector also spoke with staff throughout the inspection to gather their views.

Inspection team

Michael Williams, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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