

Inspection of Sandling Primary School

Ashburnham Road, Penenden Heath, Maidstone, Kent ME14 2JG

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 May 2025

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Early years provision **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils benefit from a rich and broad learning experience in this school. Alongside the formal curriculum, pupils' wider development is prioritised through a range of well-considered enrichment opportunities. Weekly outdoor learning sessions support pupils to develop their resilience, safety awareness and problem-solving skills. Pupils participate regularly in extra-curricular clubs. The school ensures that pupils' interests and needs are considered when planning which clubs to offer, so that those who will benefit most are encouraged to attend.

Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of equality and justice. They are proud that discrimination is not tolerated in their school. Pupils enjoy learning about different religions, cultures and beliefs. This helps them to engage in meaningful discussions and to develop their understanding of different perspectives.

The quality of pastoral care for pupils, from the early years upwards, is strong. Pupils feel safe, valued and listened to. Staff provide a range of leadership opportunities so that pupils can help shape their school and develop valuable life skills. Anti-bullying ambassadors and peer mediators are well trained to promote positive friendships and to help resolve conflict.

The school engages positively with families and the wider community. Parents and carers speak highly of the nurturing environment where their children are happy and thriving.

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

The school curriculum is highly ambitious for all pupils. Its well-considered design is a real strength of the school. Starting from the early years, learning is broken into detailed small steps that help pupils to build their knowledge effectively over time. As a result, pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve well.

Pupils are enthusiastic about their education and enjoy being challenged in their learning. Pupils participate well in lessons and are confident to discuss their ideas. This is because staff know what works well for pupils and have expertise in the subjects that they teach. Staff explain new concepts clearly. They carefully choose resources that support pupils to deepen their learning. From the early years upwards, teachers use effective strategies to check pupils' understanding. This helps to ensure that pupils are only moved on to new learning when they are ready. Where pupils may need additional support in their learning, the school identifies their needs well. Pupils with SEND learn effectively as a result of targeted support and in-class adaptations.

Reading is prioritised. Pupils benefit from expert phonics teaching that supports them in becoming accurate and fluent readers. Children start to learn phonics as soon as they start in Reception. Reading practice continues to be an important part of pupils' daily routine as they move through the school. Staff monitor pupils' progress in reading regularly so that extra support can be put in place swiftly. As a result, pupils read with confidence and increasing independence.

Most of the time, pupils produce work of a high standard and can make important connections in their learning. In Reception, mathematics teaching is less secure than other areas of early learning. Sometimes, teaching focuses on activities rather than children's understanding of mathematical concepts. This can affect how well children are able to apply new mathematical learning as it is introduced.

Pupils have positive attitudes to their learning. They attend school regularly and on time. Pupils are motivated to succeed and enjoy their wider school experiences. High expectations are established in the early years, where children are focused and cooperative. Expectations remain high throughout the school. Pupils are polite, kind and courteous. They behave very well. On the rare occasions where behaviour falls short of expectations, staff address this swiftly and consistently, so that pupils correct their choices. Staff provide effective support to pupils who need additional help to regulate their behaviour and emotions. As a result, the learning environment is calm and orderly and social times are purposeful.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and are well prepared for the next stages of their learning and development. They understand the importance of maintaining positive mental and physical health. In the early years, children start to forge strong relationships built on mutual respect. Through the school, pupils continue to strengthen their values as they actively seek to be responsible citizens.

Leaders, at all levels, are relentlessly ambitious for pupils to have the best start in life. They are considerate of staff well-being and workload when making important improvements to the school's work. Staff are well supported with high-quality professional development. Governors know the school well and understand their roles. They provide effective challenge and support to leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Sometimes, the teaching of early mathematics focuses on task completion rather than mathematical concepts. As a result, pupils may not build sufficiently strong foundations for future mathematics learning. The school should ensure that teaching in the early years enables children to explore mathematical concepts.

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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked-after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	118511
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10379799
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	417
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	John Viner
Headteacher	Claire Coombes
Website	www.sandling.kent.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	4 and 5 February 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher. They also met with governors, a representative from the local authority, members of the senior leadership team and other staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, computing, art and design and religious education. For each deep dive, inspectors: held discussions about the curriculum; visited a sample of lessons; spoke to teachers; spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. Inspectors met with pupils to consider their views on the education they receive and their wider development.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors met with groups of staff and considered the opinions expressed through Ofsted's online staff survey. Inspectors also took account of the views of parents expressed through the online survey for parents and carers, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

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