

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Ulcombe Church of England Primary School

The Street, Ulcombe, Maidstone, Kent ME17 1DU

Inspection dates:

10 June 2025

Outcome

Ulcombe Church of England Primary School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are safe and happy in this friendly school. The school forms trusting relationships with parents and carers. Staff know their pupils and are sensitive to their individual needs. They show great care for pupils' well-being. Pupils have a voice in the school. For example, the termly 'big question' afternoons encourage pupils to contribute their ideas and views about the school. Pupils proudly take on a range of responsibilities. For example, pupils in the school council support local and national charities.

There is a high proportion of pupils who join and leave the school during the school year. This presents a challenge for the school to ensure that pupils swiftly gain the knowledge and skills needed. Nonetheless, the school is ambitious for pupils. The school helps new pupils to settle quickly and motivates them to work hard. As a result, pupils achieve well from their starting points.

Pupils behave well. They form very positive relationships with one another and with adults. They enjoy spending time with one another when at play. Playtimes are busy and active times for pupils. Pupils know the school rules and see these as fair. Pupils are confident that staff are there to help them to resolve any conflict.

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

The school provides a curriculum that matches the needs and interests of the pupils well. The school has set out clear curricular goals and the steps of learning towards these in each subject. The curriculum helps teachers to know what to teach in mixed-age classes. Leaders help to manage teachers' workload. For example, the school's systems for

overseeing the curriculum and checking how it is working are not burdensome for teachers. They allow teachers to focus on delivering the curriculum effectively. The school ensures that the curriculum broadens pupils' knowledge and understanding. For example, in art, pupils study a range of artists from differing cultures. In music, pupils learn about musicians from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community.

Pupils' outcomes in national tests in 2024 were very low. Many pupils have missed time in school and have developed gaps in their learning. Nonetheless, the school has high aspirations for pupils. The school ensures that pupils who are new to the school settle quickly and form a positive attitude to learning. The school follows a national programme for phonics. This helps pupils to learn how to read. Teachers introduce nursery rhymes and traditional tales to pupils in the early years. While some pupils gain the fluency in reading needed, many have fallen behind. The school swiftly addresses this and ensures that pupils receive the targeted support they need. As such, pupils develop a love of story and gain the knowledge needed to read. Overall, teachers support pupils to develop their mathematical understanding well. However, this is not always the case. Sometimes, teachers do not encourage pupils to think more deeply. They do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge in other subjects. This hinders some pupils' progress through the curriculum.

Children in the early years are supported well. They develop positive relationships with one another and relish learning outside and inside the classroom. Activities are varied and encourage children to explore their learning through play effectively.

The school identifies the needs of pupils accurately. Staff support pupils with special needs and/or disabilities appropriately. They provide helpful adaptations in class. This enables pupils to access what they need to learn. Teachers check what pupils know and use this to inform future learning. However, while the school has refined its approach to checking pupils' learning and providing feedback, this is not fully embedded. As such, occasionally, teachers do not give pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work. This means that some gaps in pupils' learning are not addressed effectively and may persist.

Learning in classrooms is focused and purposeful. This is because of the high expectations for behaviour in the school. The school has robust systems in place for monitoring and tracking pupils' attendance. While some pupils have high levels of absence, the school knows the reasons for this. It builds trusting relationships with pupils' families and supports them to help reduce their children's absences.

The school provides ambitious opportunities for pupils' wider development. The cultural background of the pupils is celebrated. Pupils learn about life in modern Britain. They respect the views of others. The school enables pupils to extend their interests through a range of clubs and visits beyond the school. Pupils visit the local church and undertake fieldwork in geography. Pupils who would otherwise miss after-school clubs attend lunchtime clubs. These include magic, nature and orienteering clubs.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Occasionally, teachers do not provide pupils with opportunities to apply what they have learned in mathematics or to deepen their mathematical thinking. This means that pupils do not always embed key mathematical knowledge learned. The school should ensure that it supports teachers to provide further opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge when working across the curriculum so that they embed what they learn.
- The clarity of feedback that teachers give pupils in some subjects is limited. This means that some gaps in pupils' learning are not addressed effectively. The school should continue to embed their approach to formative feedback so that teachers swiftly address gaps in pupils' knowledge.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 for overall effectiveness in April 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.

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	118631
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10379801
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	66
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Annie Allum
Headteacher	Emma Hickling (Executive Headteacher) Olenka Parsons (Head of School)
Website	www.ulcombekentsch.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 November 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Aspire Federation, consisting of four local rural primary schools, with a single governing body. The executive headteacher is responsible for this school and three others.
- This is a voluntary-controlled Church of England school. The last section 48 inspection of the school's religious character took place in November 2024.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- 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. The inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspectors met with the executive headteacher, head of school, federation leads, members of the governing body, other leaders and a range of staff.
- The inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- The inspectors reviewed a wide range of documents, including those related to governance of the school.
- The inspectors spoke with a representative of the local authority and the Diocese of Canterbury.
- The inspectors considered the views of parents and carers through their responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. The inspectors spoke to staff and considered the views of staff and pupils in the staff and pupil surveys. The inspectors spoke to pupils and parents during the inspection.

Inspection team

Graham Chisnell, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Louise Lythgoe

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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