

Inspection of Combs Ford Primary School

Glensford Road, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 2PN

Inspection dates:	11 and 12 February 2025
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Kathryn Day. The school is part of The Children's Endeavour Trust, which means that other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Daniel Jones, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ian Scott.

What is it like to attend this school?

At Combs Ford, pupils are happy. At breaktimes, they enjoy activities such as choosing books from the reading shed. Pupil play leaders kindly support younger children to play various sporting games. Pupils are confident that staff will listen to them and help them sort any issues out. This helps pupils to keep safe.

Staff have high expectations for behaviour. Pupils meet these by following the 'Rainbow Rules'. Pupils who need extra help to manage their emotions receive effective support. Staff support pupils to use the 'quiet club' at lunchtimes. This is a calming space for pupils to reflect and talk about their feelings.

Pupils have experienced some recent improvements to their learning. For example, they now study a full range of subjects and benefit from a consistent approach to learning to read. However, all of this is relatively new. The changes are not yet fully embedded. Consequently, not all pupils achieve as well as they could.

There are many opportunities for pupils to pursue their interests. Pupils who are part of the school council worked with a local charity to get a 'buddy bench' for their school playground. Eco-councillors undertake litter picks. These support their learning about being responsible citizens.

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

There have been recent significant changes to leadership and staffing. Therefore, the curriculum has not been developed or delivered as well as it should. Consequently, pupils have developed gaps in their knowledge and understanding and outcomes in some of the 2024 national tests and assessments were low.

The trust has set about addressing these issues effectively. For example, it has ensured that a suitable curriculum is now in place and has started training newly appointed subject leaders. This has enabled them to improve teachers' subject knowledge. Although the quality of education is improving, many positive changes are relatively new and are not yet fully embedded. The school has not yet ensured that pupils can build upon important knowledge.

The school has an effective approach to teaching early reading and phonics. Staff are well trained to deliver the school's chosen programme. Children confidently articulate sounds and blend them together to read simple and then more complex words. They practise reading with books that match the sounds they know. If pupils fall behind with their reading, there is effective and appropriate help to ensure they can catch up with their peers. Many pupils become confident and fluent readers. However, for pupils in the early stages of writing, teachers do not routinely correct simple letter formation and spelling errors. As a result, gaps in pupils' knowledge grow. This hinders their progression through the writing curriculum as they move through the school.

Children in the early years benefit from a well-planned and sequenced curriculum. Staff provide a broad range of appropriate activities that cover all the required areas of learning. Children are supported effectively to practise their sounds, letters and numbers through a wide variety of both teacher-led and self-chosen tasks. Highly skilled staff swiftly correct any misconceptions. Children show self-determination in their learning, for example when transferring water into various containers, comparing which holds more or less liquid. They are prepared for Year 1.

The school has enabled pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to access the curriculum effectively. This is because staff are aware of pupils' individual needs. They cater for these needs by adapting learning well. For example, through providing extra resources or adult support. Consequently, pupils with SEND progress well from their various starting points.

The school actively supports pupils' regular attendance. When pupils do not attend regularly, the school works effectively with parents to support a return to school. Pupils behave well during lessons and unstructured times. They are polite and kind to adults and their peers.

The school's personal development provision is strong. Pupils demonstrate the school's 'Rainbow Values' throughout the school day. Pupil 'rights rangers' are appointed from each class. They work to ensure that these values are consistently upheld. For example, they recently wrote a set of lunchtime rules to ensure the value of respect was supported at lunchtimes. Pupils know that diversity should be celebrated. They benefit from the various trips on offer, such as Year 4 visiting Colchester Castle to support their learning in history and the school choir performing recently at a large choral event. A range of clubs further supports and develops pupils' social development and self-esteem.

The trust, those responsible for governance and school leaders, recognised that the school needed to improve. They have put in place clear plans to address this while also being considerate of staff's workload and well-being. These plans are showing early signs of positive impact. However, more time is required.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers do not routinely correct pupils' simple handwriting or spelling mistakes or their writing of the sounds they have been taught in phonics. As a result, gaps in pupils' knowledge grow. These gaps hinder their progress through the writing curriculum as they move up the school. The school must ensure that systems to correct pupils' errors in handwriting and spelling are consistently applied so that pupils are

supported effectively to improve these key skills.

- The school has made many recent improvements to several subjects, although these improvements are yet to be fully embedded. The trust has not yet ensured that all staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver these newly agreed strategies. Consequently, pupils have gaps in their knowledge and struggle to build upon prior learning due to inconsistencies in teaching delivery. The school should ensure that all staff effectively and consistently deliver the newly agreed strategies across all subjects and classes.
- There have been significant changes to staffing over the past academic year. This has led to inconsistencies in the delivery and development of the curriculum and low pupil outcomes. The trust, governors and school leaders must ensure that their development of the curriculum is robust, therefore driving effective school improvement strategies to help raise pupil outcomes.

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	147880
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10345524
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	361
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ian Scott
CEO of the trust	Daniel Jones
Headteacher	Kathryn Day
Website	www.combsfordprimary.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Combs Ford Primary School converted to become an academy in April 2020. When its predecessor school, Combs Ford Primary, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good for overall effectiveness.
- There have been significant changes to staffing since the previous inspection of the predecessor school. The new headteacher joined the school in September 2022. The deputy headteacher was appointed in November 2024. There is currently a vacancy for the chair of the governing body.
- The school is part of The Children's Endeavour Trust.
- The school presently uses two registered and two unregistered alternative provisions.

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 and/or sixth form 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. The 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 senior school and trust staff, including the chair and vice-chair of the trust board, the CEO, the head of school improvement and members of the local governing body.
- Inspectors met with other staff, including teachers and support staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, history and physical education. For each deep dive, the 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 spent time in early years and spoke with children and staff there. They also considered the curriculum in some other subjects, including science, art and geography.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around the school and at social times.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff and pupils through Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys and of parents and carers through responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. The inspectors spoke to some parents on the playground. Inspectors also gathered the views of staff and pupils through meetings and discussions throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Stephen Cloke, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Rob Edwards	Ofsted Inspector
Charlotte Martin	Ofsted Inspector

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