

St Mary's CofE (A) First School

The Heath, Uttoxeter, ST14 7LX

Inspection dates 24–25 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- There is too much variation in the quality of teaching and, as a result, pupils' progress is uneven in Years 1 to 4.
- In some lessons, pupils spend too long listening to lengthy explanations and, when this occurs, they lose interest and their behaviour deteriorates.
- The marking of pupils' work does not always provide clear guidance on their next steps in learning.
- Procedures used by leaders for checking the quality of teaching do not lead to sharply focused action points for the teachers that will improve their performance and raise pupils' achievement.
- The link between setting targets for teachers to improve their performance and the further training they need is not close enough to improve teaching fast enough.
- Governors do not gather enough first-hand evidence of the school's performance so they can take action to improve it.

The school has the following strengths

- The teaching of early reading skills is good and pupils develop into confident readers who enjoy an interesting range of books.
- Good leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage ensures children progress well in a stimulating learning environment.
- The school has a calm atmosphere and pupils behave well in the corridors and playground.
- Pupils are given a good range of additional activities outside lessons.
- Safeguarding arrangements are secure and parents report that their children are kept safe in school.
- The school is good at helping pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 18 lessons, three of which were joint observations with the headteacher. Inspectors also observed two school assemblies and made a number of other short visits to classrooms.
- The inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, other staff and pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, and some parents and carers at the start of the school day. A telephone conversation was also held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors heard groups of pupils of different ages reading.
- The inspectors took account of 20 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- They looked at the school's policies, teachers' planning of learning, school improvement planning and records on behaviour and safety, together with samples of pupils' work. They also looked at tracking documentation of individual pupils' progress, documentation on how leaders manage teachers' performance and minutes from meetings held by the governing body.

Inspection team

Kenneth Thomas, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Amanda Johnson

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mary's CofE First School is below-average in size compared with schools of a similar type.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (which provides additional funding for particular pupils who need it) is average.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds or have English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is average, as are the proportions supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- There is one Reception class in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- There is a pre-school nursery on the school site, but it is not managed by the governing body and was not part of this inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in Years 3 and 4, so that it is consistently good by ensuring that:
 - teachers' explanations are not too long and that pupils fully understand what they are expected to learn
 - the work set for pupils is engaging and matched to their ability levels, particularly in Years 3 and 4
 - in the marking of pupils' work, they are given clear guidance on their next steps in learning, and are given time to respond to the comments written in their books
 - teaching assistants are always actively involved in supporting pupils' learning, including when the teacher is leading the whole class, and making sure pupils learn as much as possible for themselves.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the checking of the quality of teaching leads to sharply focused action that has a positive impact on pupils' progress
 - the setting of targets for teachers to improve their practice and training opportunities are clearly linked to school improvement priorities that will raise pupils' achievement
 - governors have the skills necessary to find out how well the school is doing and hold its leaders to account for its performance.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Although the school has made notable improvements since the previous inspection, pupils' progress and achievement are variable in different classes and subjects in Years 1 to 4. Consequently, overall achievement requires improvement.
- Children's skills on entry to Reception are generally below those typical for their age. Their personal, social and emotional development, communication and calculation skills are not at the levels usually found nationally for this age group.
- Because teaching in Reception is consistently good, children make good progress in all areas of learning and reach the national average by the time they enter Year 1.
- The good progress made in Reception is not built upon well enough because of inconsistencies in teaching and learning in Years 1 to 4. Pupils make good progress in some lessons but slower progress in others. As a result, their attainment remains average at the end of Year 2 and in line with what is typical for the age group at the end of Year 4.
- Although pupils' attainment in English and mathematics is broadly average overall, reading is a particular strength. A structured programme for the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) helps pupils learn basic reading skills. Their skills are supported by regular opportunities to read by themselves or with staff. As a result, their reading standards at the end of Year 2 are above average and, by Year 4, most pupils enjoy reading books that interest and entertain them and can also use their reading skills to gather information.
- The progress made by pupils for whom the school receives additional funding through the pupil premium is also too variable with some making good or better progress while others do not achieve as well even with the additional funding.
- The progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs varies because of inconsistency in the quality of the support provided in lessons.
- The most rapid progress is made in lessons where pupils are motivated by well-planned tasks that engage them actively in learning. In lessons where they are less active or required to listen for long periods, they lose interest and progress slows.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- There are a number of strengths in teaching but its quality is too variable.
- Across Years 1 to 4, there is wide variability in the quality of teaching. In lessons where teaching is inadequate or requires improvement, pupils are often required to sit and listen to lengthy explanations by the teacher, and work is not matched closely enough to their abilities and their next steps in learning. As a result, some pupils lose concentration, they do not behave well enough and their progress suffers. This situation applies particularly in Years 3 and 4.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work varies too much in its quality and effectiveness. Some is good with clear pointers for improvement, while other marking does not help the pupils to improve enough. Where pupils are given guidance on what things to do to improve, they are not always

given enough time to do the things the teacher indicates were wrong, so pupils do not learn from their own mistakes.

- Teachers generally make good use of materials and equipment to help learning, especially in the good teaching usually seen in Reception. For example, both the indoor and outdoor areas were used well to improve children's range of skills. Use of the climbing frame, bicycles and scooters promoted children's physical development and every opportunity was taken to develop their language and numeracy skills through questioning and counting.
- The most effective teaching is where learning is well planned, captures pupils' interest and makes the most of their willingness to learn. Where teachers set work that makes the pupils active learners and makes clear exactly what they are expected to learn, good progress is made. For example, in one lesson observed, the teacher made good use of her subject knowledge to extend pupils' understanding of how the use of adjectives can make sentences more interesting. Pupils were highly motivated because the work actively engaged and interested them and they made good gains in learning.
- Where the learning of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and others who need extra help is most successful, teachers use teaching assistants well to support individuals and small groups. Consequently, these pupils make good progress towards their learning targets. In less effective learning situations, teaching assistants are only passively engaged listening to teachers' lengthy explanations to pupils, or doing too much of the work for pupils they are supporting.
- The teaching of those pupils eligible for the pupil premium varies too much. When the work set was not well matched to their ability levels, some went off task and made limited progress.
- Staff have good relationships with pupils, and most lessons proceed in a calm atmosphere.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

- Pupils' attitudes to learning are directly linked to the quality of teaching. In lessons where the work is stimulating and engaging they are keen to learn. In lessons where learning is not made interesting enough, the off-task behaviour of those who are not fully engaged disturbs the learning of others. Some pupils said that a few did not behave well all of the time, but thought that behaviour was generally good.
 - Pupils are generally polite and helpful to adults in school. They willingly take on responsibility and through, for example, the school council or as assembly monitors, play a constructive role in the life of the school.
 - Pupils report that they feel safe, secure and happy in school. Most parents and carers agree, although a few expressed concerns about behaviour. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe and are knowledgeable about risk and danger for their age.
 - Pupils have a superficial understanding of all sorts of bullying. Many mix up occasional falling out with bullying. Nevertheless, almost all pupils said that bullying is not a concern. Inspection evidence shows that bullying is very rare in school. Pupils are confident that adults will look after them well if they have any concerns.
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- Behaviour in the Reception class is consistently good. The vast majority of children quickly learn and accept adults' expectations of behaviour. They play well together and learn to share toys and resources.
- Pupils are punctual at the start of the day and most come to school regularly.

The leadership and management require improvement

- The headteacher and staff are ambitious for the school to be more successful and work well together as a committed team. The positive tackling of weaknesses in the Early Years Foundation Stage identified in the previous inspection, together with the improvement seen in pupils' reading, demonstrate the school has enough capacity to go on improving.
- Senior leaders check the quality of teaching through lesson observations. They scrutinise pupils' work to see what progress they are making and how helpful the marking of it is. However, specific areas for improvement of teaching are not clearly identified, both for teaching skills in general and those of individual teachers. Consequently, leaders do not always know enough about teaching quality to be sure all decisions on pay and promotion are fully justified by teachers' skills in ensuring pupils make good progress.
- The links between the targets set for teachers to improve their work and the training opportunities to help them do so are not close enough. Therefore, key priorities for improving teaching are not always tackled quickly enough.
- The teaching and learning programmes and range of subjects help pupils reach average levels of attainment. These programmes are enhanced through a variety of sports, musical and performing arts activities. Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is promoted well through both the taught subjects and through assemblies where pupils sing together enthusiastically, worship and are encouraged to reflect on moral issues.
- Pupils' progress is carefully tracked by teachers and senior staff to identify and provide additional support for any groups that may be falling behind. Pupils eligible for the pupil premium receive targeted individual support and steps are taken to ensure they are able to take part in all the school has to offer.
- Parents and carers commented favourably that help for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs makes sure they are able to experience all learning opportunities available. Inspectors agree with them. This reflects the school's commitment to equality of opportunity and the successful elimination of discrimination.
- Good leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the good links established with parents and carers have a positive impact on the development of children's academic and social skills. While most parents and carers with children in other years expressed satisfaction with the school, a few others showed concern. The school is intent on exploring these concerns and strengthening links between the home and school.
- The involvement of the local authority has been 'light touch' since the last inspection, and the school has received little external guidance on the monitoring and evaluation of its performance.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors are very supportive and fully committed to ensuring the school’s future success, but they have paid too little attention to exploring the reasons for variation in the achievement of different classes and how these link to strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Consequently, they do not have a clear enough understanding of the quality of teaching and do not make fully effective use of the salary scale to recognise the successful raising of achievement. They are not, therefore, in a position to hold the school’s leaders fully to account for its performance. Governors manage funding conscientiously and ensure that income through the pupil premium is spent for the purposes intended and that these pupils have equal access to everything the school gives its pupils. However, they are less secure in understanding how effective the extra funding is in enabling these pupils to make progress. Governors ensure that statutory duties are met, including those relating to safeguarding of pupils, and all necessary checks are carried out to ensure pupils’ safety.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	124344
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	402255

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	182
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hermoine Montgomery
Headteacher	Jennifer Hammersley
Date of previous school inspection	08 October 2009
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