

St George's Lower School

East Street, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 1EW

Inspection dates 13–14 December 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

- In too many lessons, teaching is not good enough to enable pupils to make as much progress as they could.
- Teachers do not make the best use of assessment information to match work to pupils' different needs and abilities.
- Pupils do not make fast progress in writing and mathematics.
- Pupils are not always given clear enough guidance about how to improve their work.
- The governing body does not always update school policies promptly enough or make sure its members are trained regularly.

The school has the following strengths

- The interim headteacher, with good support from the Chair of the Governing Body, has brought stability and is providing the necessary momentum to take the school forward.
- There is some good teaching on which the school can build.
- Standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 4 have risen steadily and are predicted to improve further.
- Pupils are making good progress in developing their reading skills.
- Pupils' behaviour and attendance have improved, and they have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe.
- The staff work as a team and are committed to improving outcomes for pupils.
- The governing body and senior leaders have accurately identified the school's strengths and areas for development. They are taking appropriate steps to address the shortcomings.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed seven lessons, of which two were joint observations with the interim headteacher. In addition, the inspector made a number of other shorter visits to lessons and heard some pupils in Years 2 and 4 read.
- Meetings were held with the interim headteacher, members of the governing body, staff, groups of pupils, and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including the data the school has collected on pupils' attainment and progress, procedures for keeping pupils safe and the school's review of the quality of its work.
- There were no responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).

Inspection team

David Wynford-Jones, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is considerably smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. There is no predominant minority ethnic group and nearly all of the pupils speak English as their first language.
- The proportions of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action, and at school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs, are well above the national averages.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, who are looked after by the local authority or whose families are in the Armed Forces) is well above the national average.
- The school has been without a permanent headteacher since February 2010. The current interim headteacher joined the staff in April 2011. A new deputy headteacher was appointed two weeks before the inspection, having previously worked as a teacher in the school.
- The school is in the process of seeking academy status.
- A privately run nursery shares the site with the school. It was not part of this inspection and is inspected separately.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure teaching is at least good in most lessons by:
 - making more effective use of assessment information to plan work that is suitably demanding for pupils of different needs and abilities
 - ensuring all lessons proceed at a fast pace
 - providing staff with more opportunities to share and build on existing good practice.
- Raise standards and quicken pupils' progress in writing and mathematics by:
 - concentrating on making certain that pupils develop their basic skills in writing, for example, their handwriting, spelling, use of punctuation and the formation of well-constructed sentences
 - developing pupils' skills in undertaking mathematical investigations and extending their knowledge and understanding of mathematical terminology
 - ensuring that marking always provides pupils with clear guidance about what to do next to reach their targets.
- Ensure the governing body updates policy documents with greater urgency and that members attend training sessions more regularly, including those that will develop their knowledge of data.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Recent assessment information shows that pupils' progress is beginning to quicken but their progress over time is not yet fast enough to ensure they reach the nationally expected standards by the end of Year 4. Pupils' progress tends to be quicker in Years 3 and 4, where the teaching is stronger, than it is lower down the school.
- When pupils leave the school, their attainment in reading is broadly in line with expectations for their age but it is lower than expected in writing and mathematics. This is because pupils make good progress in reading, whereas their progress is slower in writing and mathematics.
- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge below those expected for their age. They settle quickly and form good relationships with the adults. However, by the end of the Reception class, few reach the expected levels. Standards on entry to Year 1 are, therefore, usually below average.
- Pupils' writing skills at the end of Years 2 and 4 are below the expected levels. Pupils write for a range of purposes and in different styles, for example, they write stories, poems, letters and record factual information. There are examples, particularly in Years 3 and 4, of pupils writing interesting sentences and using adjectives effectively to bring their writing to life, but the majority have yet to develop basic writing skills appropriate to the age.
- Throughout the school, pupils' work is often poorly presented as their handwriting skills are underdeveloped. Many do not spell everyday words correctly and have not developed different ways to help them make sure words are spelt correctly, for example, by using a dictionary or drawing on their knowledge of the sounds that letters make. Basic punctuation is often left out or used incorrectly. Following the recent introduction of a published scheme, the work in pupils' writing books shows that they are starting to master these basic skills but more could reasonably be expected of most pupils.
- In mathematics, standards are rising and in Years 2 and 4, pupils have a fair understanding of numbers and shape. Nevertheless, their lack of knowledge of mathematical terminology, their underdeveloped skills in problem solving and mathematical investigation slows their progress.
- Although overall standards at the end of Year 4 are below average, this is a marked improvement on the situation in 2009 when standards were exceptionally low in reading, writing and mathematics. The school predicts that pupils' attainment at the end of this year will continue the improving trend. Inspection evidence suggests that this is likely to be the case.
- In Year 2, pupils' reading skills are developing reasonably well. Most enjoy books and read on a regular basis. They use their knowledge of the sounds that letters make to read unfamiliar words. By Year 4, pupils' skills in reading are similar to those expected for the age. Pupils read with expression and at a good pace. They make appropriate use of clues in the story to work out the meaning of unfamiliar words. Several talk quite knowledgeably about their favourite authors and explain why they like their style of writing.
- The progress of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is improving. The interim headteacher monitors their progress every half term and makes sure that additional support is provided if necessary. As a result, the gap in performance between these groups and other pupils is closing.

The quality of teaching**requires improvement**

- Teaching requires improvement because pupils do not make rapid progress in enough lessons. In some lessons, the pace is too slow and the teacher's expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. This is because assessment information has not been used effectively to set work that is closely matched to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. There are missed opportunities to promote pupils' mathematical investigation skills and to promote their knowledge and understanding of mathematical terminology.
- Although the marking of pupils' work has improved, they are not consistently being told what they need to do to reach their targets in mathematics. There are some good examples of helpful comments in pupils' English books but this is not consistent.
- There is some good teaching on which the school can build. In lessons where teaching is good, there is a positive learning atmosphere. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the challenges and take an active part in their learning. Teachers ensure that the content captures the interests of pupils and the work is well matched to their needs. Lessons are conducted at a quick pace and teachers use questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding and probe their thinking.
- All teachers have a good relationship with their pupils and use a number of ways to encourage good behaviour. This has contributed much to speeding up pupils' progress. Support staff are used effectively so that all pupils are included and have equal access to the same learning opportunities as other pupils.
- Following the recent introduction of a topic or themed approach to learning, links between subjects are becoming established and pupils are beginning to see the relevance of their learning. Planning includes appropriate opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Teachers are helping pupils to develop a love of books and are promoting their reading skills through the systematic teaching of the sounds that letters make and encouraging them to read in school and at home.
- Teachers have responded positively to suggestions to improve pupils' achievement, for example, through the introduction of monthly writing assessment tasks and reviewing the approach to teaching different subjects. Teachers' attendance at courses, whole staff training and half-termly pupil progress meetings with the interim headteacher are also helping to improve the quality of teaching.
- The outdoor provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is well resourced and used effectively to support their learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**requires improvement**

- Most pupils are generally courteous and polite to visitors and show respect and tolerance for each other. They behave appropriately in lessons and around the school and are developing a more positive attitude towards learning. Occasionally, this slips when lessons fail to capture their interest and, as a result, pupils do not make enough progress in these lessons. At times, pupils do not respond quickly enough to the teacher's instructions.

- Pupils say behaviour has improved considerably over the last 18 months. This is reflected in the significant drop in exclusions and fewer incidents of inappropriate behaviour.
- Pupils are aware of different types of bullying, including physical abuse, name-calling and cyber-bullying. They say that should an incident occur it will be dealt with quickly and fairly by the staff.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. For example, they are fully aware of the potential dangers when using computers to access the internet and of the difference between medicine that helps people get better and the danger of taking drugs.
- Pupils' attendance continues to improve and is now broadly average.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Until recently, staff have not taken sufficient responsibility for ensuring pupils make good progress. Changes have been made, including the recent appointment of a deputy headteacher, but ways for staff to share and build on good practice are not sufficiently well established.
 - The interim headteacher is working effectively with staff to improve outcomes for pupils. Based on a secure evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses, leaders have embarked on a programme for improvement. The impact of this can be measured by the rising standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 4, improved attendance and a significant reduction in the number of exclusions. Links with parents and carers are stronger. More are helping their children to learn and they have a greater involvement in the life of the school.
 - Staff work well together to ensure there is consistency in the assessment of pupils' work. The half-termly checks on pupils' attainment and progress are recorded and analysed systematically by the interim headteacher. She observes lessons and discusses each pupil's progress with their class teachers. Teachers are asked to explain if any pupil has not made the expected progress. The interim headteacher uses this information to advise the governing body whether individual teachers should be paid more.
 - Well-presented displays throughout the school reflect a broad curriculum. In all classes, there is an appropriate focus on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The quality of the artwork is generally above that expected. Opportunities for pupils to work together and to study art from different cultures promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively.
 - The local authority has provided good support to the school over the last few years. Effective advice has been given on developing provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, in recording and analysing school performance data and in checking on the quality of teaching and learning.
- **The governance of the school:**
- The Chair of the Governing Body works closely and effectively with the interim headteacher. There is a shared vision for the development of the school and the desire to see the school succeed. The governing body is developing well. Meetings are held on a regular basis to check the work of the school. Governors are more frequent visitors and are developing their skills through attendance at courses. However, some training lags behind that found in other schools and governors do not all know how to use data to compare the school's performance with other schools. They do have a realistic view, however, of the school's
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overall effectiveness. The governing body makes sure the school meets national requirements for safeguarding pupils but does not always ensure that all policies are updated in line with changes in statutory requirements. The Appraisal and Capability policy, which should have been in place by September 2012, has still to be approved by the governing body. The school's finances are monitored appropriately. The governing body ensures that the additional pupil premium funding is being spent wisely and that it is helping to close the gap in performance between the different groups of pupils.

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	109467
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	405240

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	79
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christopher Pine
Headteacher	Marea Rawlings
Date of previous school inspection	7 December 2010
Telephone number	01525 372096
Fax number	N/A
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