

St Nicholas Church of England Infant School

London Road, Strood, Rochester, ME2 3HU

Inspection dates 22–23 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The headteacher provides inspirational leadership and is uncompromising in her drive for excellence in all areas of school life.
- She is supported by a highly effective staff team who share her high expectations for every pupil in the school. Teachers and support staff alike are committed to doing their very best to enable pupils to enjoy school and to make rapid progress.
- Pupils learn exceptionally well in all subjects because they are treated as individuals, whose personal and learning needs are known by every adult. Activities are tailored carefully to meet these needs so that each day's learning builds on the last.
- Behaviour is exemplary and pupils take part in every lesson with great enthusiasm. They feel very safe and show respect for all around them.
- The constantly evolving, exciting curriculum gives pupils a rich variety of experiences that prepare them extremely well for junior school.
- Pupils achieve high standards in reading, writing and mathematics and do equally well in all other subjects.
- The governing body is highly effective in both challenging and supporting the school. Staff and governors work very closely together to check how well the school is doing and plan actions to make teaching even better. As a result, the school has improved even further since the previous inspection.
- Every pupil is treated as an individual and staff make sure all are given equally good opportunities to excel.
- The school works very well in partnership with parents and carers, involving them fully in their children's learning.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed parts of 14 lessons as well as a one-to-one support session for a pupil with special educational needs. All six class teachers were observed teaching. Almost all of these observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspector listened to pupils read and talked to them about their learning.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, all teachers, four teaching assistants, the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at self-evaluation and planning documents, examples of pupils' work, progress data, evidence of monitoring by staff and governors, and external evaluations of the school's work.
- The inspector took note of the 21 responses to the online Parent View survey and 24 staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Carole Skinner, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is much smaller than average. Pupils are taught in four classes: Reception, Reception/Year 1, Year 1/2 and Year 2.
- The Reception and Year 2 classes are both taught by two job-share teachers.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. An increasing number come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language has almost doubled in the last three years.
- A lower-than-average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding from the government for pupils looked after by the local authority, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, or those with parents in the armed services).
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is above average at around 17%. About 7% of pupils are currently supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. This is broadly average.
- The school does not use any alternative provision for its pupils.
- The school has won a number of awards in recent years in recognition of its achievements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strive to maintain the already outstanding teaching by:
 - making sure lesson introductions are always brisk and do not limit the time available for independent learning
 - giving teachers opportunities to observe outstanding and innovative teaching in other schools to extend their skills even further.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Pupils make rapid and sustained progress in each year group to reach well above average standards by the time they leave. Many make progress over and above that which is expected during their time at school.
- About half of the pupils start school with skills and abilities below those expected for their age, particularly in communication and language, reading, writing and in their personal and social development. In Reception, a finely tuned balance of direct teaching and learning initiated by the children enables them to settle and learn quickly so that the large majority reach a good level of development by the time they join Year 1.
- From Reception onwards, children learn sounds and letters (phonics) in a carefully structured way. As a result, they can soon blend sounds to read unfamiliar words as well as using a range of other strategies. Many older pupils read fluently and with good expression, showing great enjoyment in a variety of books and able to talk about different stories and authors.
- Progress in writing is also exceptionally good. Year 2 pupils produce some excellent writing, using their phonic knowledge to spell words correctly, writing in a neat style and using a range of punctuation correctly. Their writing is imaginative, well constructed and full of colourful language – a delight to read!
- Pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts develops at a rapid pace because teachers use a range of visual and practical resources to support learning.
- High-quality art work is on display around the school, pupils' singing is of an extremely good standard and there is evidence of above-average attainment in all other subjects.
- Pupils eligible for the pupil premium make rapid progress. Due to the very small numbers involved and the high proportion with special educational needs, their average point scores at the end of Year 2 vary from below to well above those of all pupils nationally.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make excellent progress. Almost all of these pupils reached the expected level for their age in 2012. The school is particularly successful in enabling pupils with speech and language difficulties to overcome these and make rapid progress.
- Pupils who are learning to speak English also make rapid progress and reach the expected standard for their age, or higher, by the time they leave.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching is never less than good and often outstanding, and the school's track record shows that this is consistent over time. Teachers and teaching assistants work extremely closely together to plan and deliver very effective lessons in a calm and productive atmosphere.
- Very high expectations for every pupil, regardless of background or starting points, lie at the heart of the school's success. Staff carefully adapt teaching approaches to suit pupils' different ways of learning. As a result, they develop pupils' love of learning and stimulate their curiosity.
- An innovative phonics programme, taught equally well by teachers and assistants from Reception to Year 2, is carefully tailored to the needs of each pupil and has led to dramatic improvements, especially for pupils with speech and language difficulties.
- Pupils have many opportunities to develop effective writing skills by writing stories, descriptions, instructions, reports of science investigations and imaginative accounts of events in history.
- Teachers plan lessons to motivate, engage and intrigue pupils. Pupils are encouraged to learn using all their senses and are given time to think and reflect. They particularly enjoyed learning about the Great Fire of London, which was brought to life when they constructed the houses in Pudding Lane and later watched how rapidly the fire spread as the houses burned to the ground on the school field.

- Reception staff made excellent use of the heavy snow to let children investigate 'snow painting' and to act as explorers as they dug for clues, hidden in the snow, including locks of Goldilocks' hair. As one child put it, 'She's really naughty and we have to stop her!'
- Joint planning around central themes ensures that teaching builds effectively on previous learning and ensures consistency, for example for pupils in the same year group who are taught in different classes. It also ensures topics are not repeated unnecessarily. Consequently, pupils are always experiencing fresh ideas and new ways of learning.
- The checking of pupils' progress is second to none. Staff observe, listen and talk to pupils throughout lessons to make sure they have understood new learning. They quickly pick up on errors and misconceptions, using these as teaching points for reinforcement and often returning to them the next day for consolidation.
- Pupils say they really like the 'green for good' and 'pink for think' marking because it helps them to get better. They know their individual targets, which are personal and result from frequent assessments of their progress, and use these independently. Writing targets are not just used in literacy lessons – pupils know that they apply whenever they are writing.
- Learning usually moves on at a fast pace so that pupils have plenty of time for independent, paired or group activities. Very occasionally, teachers spend a little too long on explaining things to the whole class when some pupils could more usefully be getting started on their activities.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Their regular attendance, exemplary behaviour and impeccable attitudes to learning are key reasons why pupils achieve so well. The fact that there are few entries in the behaviour log and that there have been no exclusions for five years confirms that this is typical.
- Parents' and carers' responses to the online questionnaire were totally positive and reflect what the inspector observed. Pupils are keen to learn, considerate, polite and respectful towards each other and adults.
- Pupils know how they are expected to behave at all times and they live up to these very high expectations without the need for stickers or other rewards. This is because of the consistently effective way staff encourage and motivate them.
- One of the outstanding features of the school is the way every member of staff, including office staff and midday supervisors, contributes to the care and well-being of the pupils. Every pupil has someone to talk to, who makes time to listen to them or to chat with them during the week.
- Pupils are constantly reminded of the school's values of justice, forgiveness, friendship and thankfulness, and what these mean in their everyday lives. Their faultless behaviour during worship time as they listened with rapt attention to the story of 'The Good Samaritan' and their sheer joy in singing showed that their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptional.
- There is no evidence of bullying of any kind and pupils' only concerns about safety were that they might slip and fall on the ice. The school remained open after a weekend of heavy snow and the very diligent caretaker made sure that pupils, staff, and parents and carers remained safe.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher is held in very high regard by staff, parents and carers, governors and the local authority. She has successfully built a very strong staff team, all of whom contribute to the leadership and management of the school. Between them, they have a wide range of expertise which is shared willingly and used to the greatest effect. Morale is very high. Many staff praised the strong teamwork and all feel highly valued and appreciated.
- Senior leaders are constantly looking for ways to make the school even better. They take time to find the best way forward. For example, rather than settling for an 'off-the-shelf' phonics

programme, they sampled, adapted and modified different approaches to produce their own, continually 'tweaking' it to meet every pupil's needs.

- Between them, staff have the skills and knowledge to maintain high standards. Fully involved in self-evaluation and strategic planning, they all know exactly where the school's strengths lie and what could still be better.
- Regular rigorous checks on teaching, pupils' work and progress data ensure that prompt action is taken if any pupil is not making at least good progress. High-quality leadership of the provision for special educational needs involves all staff in providing personalised support to meet pupils' specific needs.
- There is always a focus on improving teaching through sharing good practice, as well as more formal training sessions. The school uses expertise from within as well as external consultants to ensure teachers remain at the forefront of new developments. However, there are few opportunities for teachers to observe outstanding practice in other schools.
- The curriculum inspires pupils and gives them memorable experiences which bring learning to life and enable all to achieve equally well. It promotes pupils' spiritual and moral development exceptionally well, for example through philosophy lessons where pupils raise and discuss important questions.
- The school makes every effort to involve parents and carers in their children's learning. Information sessions, for example about how mathematics is taught, are very well attended.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has a wide range of expertise and undertakes regular training to increase its effectiveness. It is exceptionally rigorous in checking the quality of teaching and pupils' progress, for example through its regular planned monitoring weeks and analysis of data. Governors know exactly how well the school is performing in relation to schools nationally. They set very challenging targets for the headteacher and are very well informed about the performance of all staff and how this relates to their pay. Governors keep a close eye on how pupil premium funding is spent and are kept very well informed about the impact of this by senior leaders. The governing body is rigorous in ensuring it meets all requirements for keeping pupils safe.

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	118643
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	403355

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	116
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Moira McAllister
Headteacher	Anne-Marie Hutton
Date of previous school inspection	7 May 2008
Telephone number	01634 717120
Fax number	724626
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