

St Mark's CofE Primary School

High Street, Pensnett, Brierley Hill, DY5 4DZ

Inspection dates 12 - 13 February 2013

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		Good	2
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

- Recent improvements have increased the rate of pupils' progress. However, progress is not consistently good across all year groups or over time.
- Although many lessons are now good, the better quality teaching has not been in place long enough to help all pupils make good progress.
- In a small minority of lessons, teachers do not always check what pupils already know. This means that a few pupils do not make as much progress as they could
- The quality of feedback for pupils in teachers' marking is not consistently good across all classes and subjects. Not all pupils know how to improve their work as a result.
- Some subject leaders are new to their roles. They do not yet have the range of skills required to improve the quality of teaching or to develop links between subjects.
- Communication with parents has improved; however, the school's website is not yet online. This makes it harder for parents to find the information the school is required to publish.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils enjoy using a good range of resources in lessons and at play.
- Most teaching is now good.
- Well-planned support for less-able pupils is helping them to catch up more quickly.
- Pupils behave well, show respect towards others and feel safe. They are keen to learn and to have responsibilities in the school.
- The headteacher, ably supported by the acting deputy headteachers, provides inspirational leadership in this rapidly improving school.
- Governors know the school well and ask challenging questions to help the school improve.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 22 lessons, taught by 11 teachers, of which two were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors made short visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning in different subjects. Inspectors listened to pupils read, attended an assembly and observed break times.
- There were nine responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Due to the small number of responses, inspectors took account of the outcomes from the school's consultations with parents and spoke with several parents at the start of both days of the inspection.
- Meetings were held with two groups of pupils, a representative of the local authority, governors, school leaders and other staff.
- The information from 38 staff questionnaires was taken into consideration.
- Inspectors looked at various aspects of the school's work, including documents about pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. They checked on how the school keeps its pupils safe. They also looked at pupils' books, the school's plans for improvement, records of the checks on the quality of teaching, minutes of the governing body and local authority reports. They viewed the school's new website which is due to be launched in the next few weeks.

Inspection team

Elizabeth Cooper, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Faheem Chishti

Additional Inspector

Gwendoline Onyon

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mark's CofE Primary School is similar in size to the average primary school. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in the school's Nursery and in two Reception classes.
- Over one-third of all pupils, well above the national average, are known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium (the additional government funding for looked after children and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals).
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is above the national average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above the national average.
- Most pupils come from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- A slightly higher than average proportion of pupils joins the school other than at the usual times.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school runs several after-school clubs.
- The school does not make use of any external provision for pupils.
- Since the end of last year, there have been significant changes to the staff at the school. Five teachers joined the school in September 2012.
- The new headteacher took up her permanent post in November 2012 after two months as acting headteacher. Two acting deputy headteachers are in the senior leadership team, including a teacher seconded from the leadership team of another school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it consistently helps pupils to make good progress by:
 - making sure teachers plan activities in lesson which closely match the needs of individual pupils and improve their rates of progress
 - ensuring that teachers ask questions which check how much pupils already know and help pupils develop their thinking
 - making sure that the quality of marking is consistently good in all classes, so that pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work
 - encouraging pupils to check their own and each other's work, so that they can learn from one another
 - ensuring that the best classroom practice that exists in the school is shared more widely.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing the role of subject leaders so that they have the skills to check the quality of teaching and to plan links across the curriculum
 - improving the school's partnership with parents by having readily available information on the new school website.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- When children start school their skills are well below the levels typical for their age. Good teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) helps children to make good progress in learning to speak clearly and to recognise and write simple words. Children enjoy choosing different activities and often become absorbed when learning and playing together in the classroom and outdoors.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 have fallen in recent years, with pupils doing better in mathematics than in reading and writing. However, pupils have made more progress during this year because teaching has improved, and there are fewer variations across different groups.
- Pupils' attainment in English at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2012 rose and was in line with the national average in English, but standards remained below the national average in mathematics. Most pupils made the progress they should make in reading and writing, but fewer did so in mathematics. The school has acted quickly this year to improve the quality of teaching, and this has made a noticeable difference to pupils' attainment and progress in mathematics, including for the more-able pupils
- Information from the school's assessments shows that more pupils are now making better progress than in previous years. However, there are still some differences in the progress pupils make within each class and between subjects. Although the school has done a great deal this year to narrow the gaps, these improvements have not been in place long enough to bring about consistently good progress.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are now closer to making the progress that should be expected. This is because teachers and other adults give good support to pupils in lessons and extra individual tuition, checking that they have made enough progress.
- Pupils eligible for support from the pupil premium did not make as much progress as other pupils at the end of both key stages in 2012. This year, however, the school has made much better use of the extra funding. Inspection evidence suggests that gap in attainment between pupils eligible for free school meals and other pupils is closing as a result of the well-planned one-to-one support that pupils receive.
- Pupils enjoy books and change them regularly. Their reading to inspectors showed that they knew how to tackle new words, although not all pupils were equally skilled in using clues in the text or pictures to help them work out meanings.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Most teaching is now good, and pupils are making more rapid progress because of this. However, the better teaching is a relatively recent trend which has not yet made sufficient difference to the achievement of pupils over time. Teaching therefore requires improvement.
- In many lessons, interesting activities planned by teachers have pupils 'buzzing' with enthusiasm. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson, groups of pupils were intensely involved in tackling a series of problems to help them work out a murder mystery. As pupils explained, 'solving problems in all these different ways' helped them to become more confident about mathematics. Where pupils could choose how to tackle an activity, they rose to the challenge, as in an

outstanding Year 1 lesson, where they developed their own ideas for sorting shapes. In a few lessons, activities were not always set at the right level to help pupils make good progress.

- Teachers' questioning is good where it helps pupils to work out answers for themselves. In a Year 3-4 mathematics lesson, the teacher's questions about a series of numbers gave just enough hints for a pupil to think through the correct answer. In a science lesson, the teacher's questioning helped pupils discuss why each group's experiments had led to different results. However, not all teachers make the best use of questions to test how much pupils already know and help them develop their thinking.
- In most lessons, pupils know their targets and what they need to do to improve. In a Year 3-4 English literacy lesson, a menu-style card on the table gave each pupil a target in writing. Pupils used their targets to help them plan a letter in the style of a character from their reading book.
- Pupils are well supported by teachers and other adults, in the classroom and in one-to-one sessions, and this helps pupils make better progress in their English and mathematics.
- The quality of marking has improved. In the best marking, teachers wrote further questions in the books, to give pupils extra practice. Teachers' guidance to pupils was clear, and pupils' next piece of work was of better quality. However, not all marking is as good, and teachers do not always check that pupils have finished the extra tasks. Pupils do not often have the chance to check their own and each other's work

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils say they enjoy coming to school 'because lessons are often fun', especially when they can work with each other. They settle quickly to their learning as soon as they arrive in their classrooms in the morning, and this sets the pattern for good behaviour throughout the day. Pupils concentrate well in lessons, and in their groups they talk about their learning. However, where the work is less interesting or is too easy, pupils find it harder to pay attention.
 - Pupils especially like the new 'golden book' for each class where teachers record good achievement and effort on a separate page for each pupil. They are equally keen not to have their name added to the incident book. They look forward to the 'achievement assemblies' which celebrate their efforts.
 - Pupils are confident that teachers and other adults at the school will help them sort out any concerns they have. New pupils are made welcome and settle quickly.
 - Pupils feel safe in school. Lessons and assemblies on cyber-bullying have made pupils aware of how to keep themselves safe when using the internet. Bullying and name-calling are rare, and pupils know that staff and senior leaders would deal quickly with any incidents of this kind. Pupils treat each other and adults with respect and they know right from wrong.
 - During the lunchtime, pupils mix well together. Older pupils enjoy having responsibilities such as acting as playleaders for the younger pupils and being school prefects. Pupils appreciate the facilities in the school grounds including the Prayer Garden, the fishpond and the 'trim trail'.
 - Pupils' attendance has improved for several years running and is now average. Their punctuality to school and to lessons is also better
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The leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher knows clearly what is needed so that the school can improve and all pupils can 'enjoy, achieve and succeed' in line with the school's motto. She has gained the respect of all staff, who are proud of the school and committed to raising standards for pupils.
 - The new senior leadership team has an accurate knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development. This has helped them plan the approaches that have already improved teaching and achievement this year. Leadership and management require improvement, however, because there has not yet been sufficient time for the impact of these changes to be seen.
 - Arrangements to check and improve the performance of staff are thorough, and leaders meet regularly with individual teachers to help them reflect about their work. Teachers have ambitious targets which take account of the Teachers' Standards.
 - Senior leaders have developed the role of teachers in charge of key areas of the school's work, and this has already made a difference to the quality of teaching in English and mathematics. Other teachers have embarked on new roles as subject leaders, but do not yet have the skills needed to check the quality of teaching and to plan ways of linking different subjects.
 - The local authority has provided good, regular support to the school on its journey to improvement. The support from an outstanding school has helped the school develop teaching, so that lessons have better pace and pupils are keen to learn. Teachers do not yet have sufficient opportunities to observe the best teaching within the school, so they can improve their own teaching.
 - The curriculum is broad and balanced. Subjects are taught separately, which allows pupils to learn about each subject in greater depth. Lessons and visits offer a wide range of activities which pupils find interesting. They have good opportunities to consider other cultures, and in their writing about the life of an Indian street child they showed their feelings about poverty. Assemblies are a central part of the school's life, developing pupils' spiritual and moral awareness. The quality of pupils' writing and drawing in their religious education lessons shows that they have a good respect for all faiths.
 - Many parents speak highly of the school. As one parent said, 'the teachers go the extra mile'. Most agree that the school is getting better at keeping in touch with them; however, the school has not published the online information required by the Department for Education. A new website is due to be launched, however.
 - The school's safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors visit the school regularly and understand the school's strengths and what it still needs to do to improve. They looked at pupils' work to see how the quality of pupils' writing has improved and linked this to better teaching. The training provided by the local authority has helped governors to become confident in analysing data and asking questions about pupils' results. Governors work closely with senior leaders to plan what needs to be improved. Their action plan sets out longer-term priorities for the school and helps governors to challenge and support the school in its current work. Governors set challenging targets for the
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headteacher's performance to make sure that the school improves rapidly. They expect pay rises for staff to be linked to good teaching. Governors check the budget regularly. They know that pupil premium is being spent well now, because it is helping eligible pupils to make better progress in reading as well as enjoying other opportunities, such as playing musical instruments. Governors seek parents' views by attending parents' evenings and looking at parent questionnaires. They know which information the school is required to publish on its new website and are confident that the website will help parents find out more about their child's school

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	103836
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	400664

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	262
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jane Price
Headteacher	Carole Smith
Date of previous school inspection	8 July 2010
Telephone number	01384 818935
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