

Little Marlow Church of England School

School Lane, Little Marlow, Buckinghamshire, SL7 3SA

Inspection dates 29–30 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- Pupils' achievement is inadequate. Pupils do not make fast enough progress because too much teaching is inadequate or requires improvement, especially in Year 1.
- In Key Stage 1, teachers do not expect enough from pupils. Work is not pitched at the right level and is sometimes easy or mundane. This does not inspire pupils to try hard. As a result, they occasionally misbehave and stop working. The teaching of letters and sounds is not confident or systematic.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs do not get enough help with their learning.
- The curriculum does not meet the needs of Year 1 pupils as they work in two classes in the afternoons and learn different things.
- Leaders have not ensured that the school has improved since the last inspection and pupils' attainment is falling. The school has a poor track record for improving teaching. Leaders do not make enough use of information about pupils' learning to check progress or to challenge teachers to improve.
- Governors are unclear about all their responsibilities and do not challenge school leaders well enough. They have failed to ensure that the additional money received from the government to support pupils eligible for free school meals is spent on helping them.
- Leaders do not rigorously check potential risks on the school site or on visits so that they can be confident that pupils' safety is never compromised.

The school has the following strengths

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have their needs met well most of the time and make good progress.
- Pupils have good manners and are kind and caring towards each other.
- Most parents and carers are pleased with the school. They make a significant contribution to their children's learning by hearing them read regularly at home and helping with homework.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed nine lessons, of which five were joint observations with the headteacher. In addition, the inspector made a number of short visits to lessons.
- Meetings were held with pupils, with members of the governing body, with members of staff and with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector took account of the 35 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). He also talked to some parents and carers individually.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own information about pupils' learning and progress, planning and monitoring documents, the school development plan, records relating to behaviour and attendance and safeguarding documents.
- The inspector analysed eight questionnaires from staff.

Inspection team

Mike Capper, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized infant school. Most pupils travel to the school from nearby towns and villages.
- Pupils are taught in three single-age classes (an Early Years Foundation Stage class and separate classes for Years 1 and 2) in the morning. In the afternoon they are taught in two mixed-age classes with Year 1 pupils split equally by age across the two.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs who are supported at school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average. None of these pupils is educated off site for any part of the week in alternative provision.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support through the additional funding in this school for children known to be eligible for free school meals (pupil premium) is very low. None of the pupils who are currently in school are eligible for free school meals but the school received funding in this academic year for eligible pupils who have only recently left.
- There have been several staff changes since the previous inspection. The new headteacher started in January 2013, after a term when the school was led by an interim headteacher.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching is consistently good so that pupils' progress in English and mathematics in Key Stage 1 improves by:
 - ensuring teachers make sharper use of information about pupils' progress to identify and tackle underachievement
 - ensuring teachers plan work that is at the right level for pupils, not too hard or too easy, and that focuses on developing basic numeracy and literacy skills at a good pace
 - improving teachers' confidence and skills in teaching the sounds that letters make (phonics)
 - making sure that teachers always expect enough of their pupils so that they are inspired to learn, work hard, concentrate on their work and behave well
 - reducing the use of worksheets in subjects such as science
 - ensuring that teachers are given clear guidance and set sharp targets to help them improve their teaching and check that it is having the desired effect.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring pupils are kept safe by systematically carrying out assessments of potential risks and taking appropriate action where needed
 - making better checks on the quality of teaching, especially the use of information about pupils' progress, and challenging teachers to improve when necessary, establishing closer links between the quality of teaching, the school's performance and pay
 - making better provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs by ensuring that these pupils are identified more quickly and are given the right support to help

them make better progress, including following more closely advice from specialist outside agencies

- creating a more balanced curriculum so that all Year 1 pupils have access to the same activities for more of the time
- providing training for the governing body on its roles and responsibilities so that it does more to hold other leaders to account
- ensuring that leaders use additional government funding to support the pupils for whom it is earmarked.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Pupils' achievement is inadequate because their progress in Key Stage 1 is too slow. Teaching does not build well enough on pupils' above-average attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2 has been historically above average but it fell in 2012, especially in mathematics, and continues to decline. Consequently, pupils' attainment in the current Year 2 is no better than broadly average, reflecting inadequate progress from their starting points.
- In Key Stage 1, pupils' literacy skills do not improve quickly enough. This is highlighted by how very few pupils reached the expected levels in the 2012 national screening check for phonics at the end of Year 1. Weaknesses in the teaching of phonics mean that not all pupils read with confidence and their writing often includes inaccurate spellings of common words as well as errors in punctuation and grammar. In Year 2, less-able pupils find it difficult to build new words when they are reading because they have a limited knowledge of the sounds that letters make. An overuse of worksheets in subjects such as science means that pupils get few opportunities to write purposefully; this means that the most able, in particular, are not challenged enough to improve their skills.
- In mathematics, while average attaining pupils improve their skills steadily, more- and less-able pupils make inadequate progress. Work does not build well enough on their starting points. The more able are insufficiently challenged and have too few opportunities to use and apply their skills in investigations and problem solving. The less able are given work that is too hard for them and they sometimes struggle to solve simple calculations.
- The school does not promote equality of opportunity well enough by ensuring that all pupils make sufficient progress. There is no planned programme for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Until recently, they were not identified quickly and they are given very little extra support to help them improve. Advice from specialist outside agencies is not followed and consequently these pupils do not achieve well enough.
- The small amount of pupil premium funding is subsumed into general school funds. Eligible pupils receive no extra targeted help and their progress is not tracked rigorously. Consequently, when they have lower attainment than others, the gap does not close.
- Pupils make the best progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. When children start school, most are working at or above what is typical for their age. Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage builds well on this and children learn quickly most of the time. They develop good confidence and become increasingly independent. They write short sentences, making good attempts to spell new words. They are articulate and make good progress in developing early reading and numeracy skills.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- Teaching does not ensure that pupils learn quickly enough. Although there is some good teaching, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage, too much requires improvement or is inadequate. Until very recently, teachers have received too little guidance to help them improve and this means that teaching in Key Stage 1 is less effective than at the time of the previous inspection. This is the main reason why pupils' attainment is falling.
- In Key Stage 1, teachers do not meet the needs of pupils well enough. When planning work, especially in Year 1, they too often follow commercial schemes without adapting work to take account of what pupils already know and can do. Frequently, work does not 'stretch' the more-able pupils and they find work too easy. In contrast, less-able pupils, including the disabled and those with special educational needs, often do exactly the same work as others and the work is too hard for them.
- The teaching of phonics is poor. Although there has been some very recent training, teachers

lack confidence when teaching phonics and their subject knowledge is weak. Skills are not taught systematically and pupils have too few opportunities to apply their knowledge of letters and sounds in their writing.

- In many lessons in Key Stage 1, teachers do not expect enough of the pupils. They too readily accept work that is untidy and they do not encourage pupils to work quickly. Lessons are often dull and, as a result, pupils become inattentive. Pupils' good skills in working by themselves as they leave the Early Years Foundation Stage are not developed further, and by Year 2, pupils are overly reliant on adult support, even asking the teacher for permission before starting to work on a new page in their writing books.
- Teachers mark work diligently and, following recent support from local authority advisers, have started to set targets for pupils so that they know the next steps in their learning. However, teachers, especially in Year 1, take too little account of these targets when deciding what to teach next.
- Teaching in Key Stage 1 is most effective when work is practical and pupils are expected to think for themselves. This was seen to good effect in a science lesson in Year 2 where pupils heated popcorn. Pupils' knowledge and understanding improved quickly because the work was challenging and they were expected to explain what they had seen.
- Teaching assistants make a good contribution to learning when working with small groups of pupils. This is seen especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, adults work together well to observe, check and record children's learning and they then use this information effectively to plan work that provides children with the right level of challenge. Children are able to work indoors and outdoors and they are given more opportunities to work independently than they were at the time of the previous inspection.
- Across the school, homework helps to improve pupils' attainment. Most pupils read regularly to an adult at home and this has a good effect on learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

- Pupils sometimes misbehave in lessons in Key Stage 1 when teaching is dull and does not inspire them fully. In Key Stage 1, pupils do not always take pride in their work and they sometimes work too slowly unless they are given constant reminders from the teacher to keep working hard.
- The school has very few pupils who have been identified as having behavioural problems but until recently they have been given too little support to help them learn to manage their own behaviour. Consequently, their behaviour sometimes disturbs the learning of others.
- Pupils' behaviour is best when lessons are fun and engaging. In a science lesson in Year 2, pupils worked enthusiastically and concentrated well because work was practical and fun. As one pupil said, 'This was the best lesson ever!'
- The school successfully ensures that there is no discrimination. Pupils from different backgrounds play together happily at playtimes. They support each other well in lessons, celebrating each other's successes when appropriate.
- When moving around school, pupils behave well. They are polite and courteous to visitors and are pleased to talk about their work. They are sociable and articulate and are kind and caring, showing good concern for the needs of others.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage where behaviour is more often good, children support each other well and are confident and happy. They share resources sensibly and show good curiosity when working.
- Although the inspection identified some concerns about safeguarding procedures, pupils say that they feel safe at school. They are confident that there is no bullying and that when pupils fall out it is tackled quickly by adults. Pupils know how to stay safe outside school. For example, they are knowledgeable about the dangers of the nearby busy road.

The leadership and management are inadequate

- Leaders have done too little to improve the overall effectiveness of the school since the previous inspection. Teachers have not been helped to improve their practice and information about pupils' progress is not used sharply to identify and tackle underachievement. While both the interim and new headteacher have made a start to tackling weaknesses, it is too soon to see the impact. Consequently, the recent and emerging fall in pupils' attainment has not yet been halted.
 - The school has a poor track record for improving teaching. Until this year, leaders did not annually review teachers' performance or set clear targets. They have not established clear links between performance and financial rewards and, where there have been checks on the quality of teaching and learning, they have not always been followed up rigorously to ensure that improvement is being secured. Opportunities for additional training have not focused on the school's main priorities and where offered have had too little effect.
 - The school does not systematically plan support for disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and for those entitled to support through the pupil premium funding. Although the amount received for the latter is very small, it is not used to provide any additional support for eligible pupils and the school does not check that they are doing well enough or that the gap between their attainment and others is closing.
 - The curriculum does not meet pupils' needs and does not promote equality of opportunity for all year groups. It lacks balance because pupils in Year 1 are split across two classes in the afternoon and do not learn the same things. However, it does promote soundly pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. Pupils happily write and say prayers and they are kind to each other but have few opportunities to take responsibility. The new headteacher acknowledges that there is too much dull teaching which diminishes pupils' love of learning as they get older.
 - The school engages well with parents and carers. Most are positive about the school and they support it well by helping their children with work at home.
 - The local authority has only recently identified the major weaknesses in provision. It has given intensive support but this has been too recent to have had any significant impact. However, its help in appointing an interim headteacher for a term ensured that there was a smooth handover to the new headteacher.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is inadequate. Governors have not been trained well enough and they are not clear about all of their responsibilities. For example, they do not check that the school carries out annual reviews of teachers' performance and do not ensure that the pupil premium is used for its intended purpose. Although recent information provided by the interim headteacher and the local authority means that they have a more realistic view of the school's performance in comparison with others, governors are over-reliant on information provided by leaders. They do not do enough to check the links between the school's performance, the quality of teaching and the salaries paid to teachers. The governing body has very limited involvement in planning for school improvement and does not do enough to keep pupils safe. While the vetting of staff is thorough, the school does not systematically carry out risk assessments on and off the school site so that it can be confident that pupils are not at risk.
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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	110466
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	401127

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	58
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dennis Harwood
Headteacher	Suzanne Best
Date of previous school inspection	15–16 March 2010
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