

St Nicholas CofE VA Primary School

Mill Lane, Cottesmore, Oakham, LE15 7DL

Inspection dates 19–20 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Teaching has improved since the last inspection and is now consistently good.
- Achievement in English and mathematics has risen in the last two years and is above the national average.
- Good teaching in the Reception class means that children make more than expected progress.
- Teachers provide pupils with work that excites and interests them. Pupils enthuse about their work and are keen to do as well as they can.
- The pace of improvement since the school's federation in 2011 has been very rapid. School leaders, and especially the headteacher, are relentless in their drive to improve teaching and raise standards.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary, and they feel very safe in school. This supports their learning in lessons and ensures that the school is a calm and harmonious place to learn.
- The governing body is exceptionally effective. Its members manage the federation very well and are highly focused in ensuring that all pupils do as well as they can.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Standards in mathematics have not risen as rapidly as those in English.
- Teaching does not always provide more-able pupils with opportunities to expand their learning in English and mathematics.
- Pupils' cultural understanding of the world is limited and some have misconceptions about life in other countries.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching in all classes. In total, eight lessons were observed. He also made short visits to lessons during which phonic skills (linking sounds and letters) were taught.
- Discussions were held with pupils, parents, the headteacher, the assistant headteacher, teachers, four members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector examined a range of documents, including a summary of the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, school data showing pupils' achievement, attendance information and policies aimed at keeping pupils safe.
- The views of 15 parents and carers were analysed through the Parent View website.
- The views expressed by 15 staff who returned a questionnaire were also considered.

Inspection team

Christopher Moodie, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- There are fewer pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds than in most schools. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at 'school action' is above average.
- The proportion who are supported at 'school action plus' or have a statement of special educational needs is also above average.
- An average proportion of pupils are supported by the 'pupil premium', which is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, in local authority care or whose parents serve in the armed forces.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Since the previous inspection, the school joined with another local primary school in a formal federation. Both schools now share the same headteacher and governing body.
- The school does not use alternative places for pupils to learn away from the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in mathematics and ensure more pupils, especially boys, reach higher levels in English and mathematics by:
 - ensuring that new initiatives introduced to improve mathematics are used consistently across the school
 - making sure that teachers give more-able pupils work that always challenges them enough in English and mathematics.
- Provide high quality opportunities for pupils to learn about, and better understand, the world beyond their school and the United Kingdom.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils across the school make more than expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The rates of progress are particularly rapid for reading.
- Children enter the Reception class with skills and knowledge that are typical among children of this age. Their progress has steadily improved in the past four terms. Children in this part of the school now all make rapid progress.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 have generally been above average in recent years. Following a dip in 2011, this trend has been continued. The phonics screening check in Year 1 confirmed that reading is an area where pupils do better than others nationally.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 were broadly in line with national averages when the school was last inspected. They began to rise in 2012 and are currently above the national average. The improvement in reading has been particularly rapid. Writing has also improved strongly. The school has focused a great deal on these subjects in the last year. Attainment in mathematics is above average, although the rate of progress has been slower than in reading and writing because the focus has only recently moved to this subject. Too few boys have attained higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics since the past inspection.
- The school has revised the way that reading is taught. Small groups of pupils with similar abilities are taught in a very systematic way. Teachers show them ways of tackling new words and this gives them confidence.
- Learning in all lessons is good. Pupils are developing independence from an early age, as seen in the outdoor learning area in the Reception class, where children make sensible choices about their work and play. This is continued in the Year 1 and 2 class and was typified when pupils were asked to measure very long pieces of paper (representing the lengths of different dinosaurs) in a corridor. Pupils set about the task with resilience and worked hard together to record their findings without the support or intervention of adults.
- A scrutiny of pupils' books indicates that progress over time is good. Pupils' present their work very well and good quality handwriting is valued by teachers and pupils.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. The school makes good use of data to identify and support those who need additional help. Parents and carers are kept well informed. Staff know the needs of the individual pupils well and this helps to ensure that the support matches their needs.
- Pupils who are supported by the pupil premium, including those who are known to be eligible for free school meals, achieve as well as other pupils. Effective monitoring of this group of pupils means that their progress is regularly checked, and extra support for reading, writing or mathematics is provided if necessary. The impact of this support is also evaluated very well.

The quality of teaching is good

- Improvements in teaching have resulted in pupils making rapid progress. Teachers are very clear about what they want pupils to learn, and have high expectations of their work and attitudes.

- Lessons are well planned. Teachers provide work that stimulates pupils' enthusiasm. They work hard to link subjects so that learning in several areas can happen at the same time. An example of this was seen in Year 6 where pupils were planning and designing a kite. They used mathematical shapes and were required to explain their designs in mathematical language. The writing that resulted was informative and concise.
- Teachers provide work that is well matched to the abilities of different pupils. Their expectations of more-able pupils are sometimes not high enough, and this means that these pupils do not always learn as much or as quickly as they could.
- Pupils' work is always well marked and accurately assessed. In some classes, pupils receive marking and guidance of an exceptionally high quality. A time for pupils to reflect on and respond to this marking has recently been introduced and is helping pupils to understand the crucial role that they have in improving their own work.
- Teaching in the Reception class is good and has improved significantly since the last inspection. Children enjoy a well-planned mix of activities they choose for themselves and others that are led by the teacher. They move freely between the classroom and the outdoor learning area and are developing important skills of working on their own, within a small group and as a class.
- Teachers make good use of questioning to deepen pupils' understanding. Opportunities to develop learning are taken most effectively when teachers gather and directly teach groups of pupils of similar abilities.
- Since the last inspection, teachers have improved the quality of opportunities for pupils to learn about different cultures in the United Kingdom. This has not yet been expanded to include the rest of the world, and there are gaps in pupils' understanding about how people live in other countries.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Parents, staff and pupils are extremely positive about behaviour. The positive ethos of the school is clear throughout the day and pupils' conduct and manners are exemplary.
- Attitudes to learning in lessons are outstanding. Pupils are ready to listen, to think, contribute and ask good questions. They cooperate well, support one another and are quick to recognise and celebrate other pupils' achievements.
- The school's focus on developing positive values towards learning has had a profound impact on pupils' behaviour since the last inspection. Pupils are able to talk about exactly what it is that makes them effective learners. During the inspection, the headteacher led an assembly which inspired pupils to consider how they can be resourceful (the current focus) and then provided them with mathematical games that would develop resourcefulness. Pupils spoke with great enthusiasm about how this kind of activity is supporting their learning.
- Behaviour around the school, in the playground and in the dining room is exceptionally good. Pupils are given regular opportunities to work independently and they thrive on, and cherish, the trust that they are given. This means, for example, that children in the Reception class use tablet computers very well without supervision: they take very good care of these expensive resources and carefully store them when they are finished.

- Pupils are clear about the different forms of bullying, and how they can play a role in making sure that it does not happen. Instances of bullying are rare, and pupils are confident that it will be dealt with effectively if it does occur.
- Pupils feel safe. They are well known to the staff as individuals and are confident that they will be helped and supported if they have problems. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The leadership of the school has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The headteacher has introduced rigour into all that the school does in the pursuit of excellence. His proven track record of success within the federation has enabled him to secure rapid improvements in teaching, achievement and behaviour.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and is based on a very effective series of monitoring activities that involve all staff at St Nicholas, along with several from the other school in the federation. School leaders make very good use of this information and plan for ongoing improvement in great detail. As a result, some very successful initiatives have been introduced in the last year which have led to improving achievement in English. School leaders recognise that mathematics has not improved as rapidly and have introduced initiatives to address this. There are very positive early signs of improvement but the impact of this work has not yet been fully seen.
- The different subjects of the National Curriculum are well organised into exciting 'units' of teaching. These provide rich opportunities for high quality learning and pupils are very motivated by the work that they do. A revised approach to the teaching of English has been very successful in improving achievement. A similar initiative for mathematics has recently been introduced.
- A very positive approach to learning, exemplified by school leaders, provides pupils with outstanding opportunities for developing socially, morally and spiritually. Improvements in cultural awareness have occurred since the previous inspection. However, they do not yet lead to pupils increasing their understanding of how the lives of people in other countries are both similar to and different from their own.
- The local authority has provided good support for the school. The change of leadership was well handled and parents are now very supportive of the school and the direction that it has taken. Parents spoken to during the inspection were overwhelmingly positive about the changes that they have witnessed since the last inspection.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is very well organised, efficient and holds the school fully to account for pupils' performance. Governors are well informed and have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and what it needs to do in order to continue improving. The school's finances are well managed. The budget was in deficit in 2011 but is now stable. Funding, including that received from the pupil premium, is targeted at raising achievement for the pupils for whom it is intended. Performance management procedures are effective in getting the best out of all members of staff. Governors are involved in setting targets to improve teachers' performance, and make good use of data on pupils' progress to make informed decisions about pay increases. The governing body ensures that all national safeguarding requirements are met.

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	120227
Local authority	Rutland
Inspection number	405918

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	100
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Evans
Headteacher	Rob Gooding
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2011
Telephone number	01572 812337
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