

St Mark's Church of England Junior School

Robert Burns Avenue, Cheltenham, GL51 6NU

Inspection dates 25–26 April 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- In the last year particularly, pupils' attainment and achievement have improved strongly in all age groups. Many pupils are reaching standards higher than average in writing and mathematics, and some pupils are outstanding readers.
- Pupils' behaviour is consistently good, and they are well cared for and safe. They have great enthusiasm for learning, especially in the wide variety of additional learning activities provided by the school.
- The provision for the learning and personal development of pupils with disabilities or special educational needs is especially effective.
- Teaching is good and occasionally better because teachers have strong relationships with their pupils and good expectations for their progress in learning. They work very closely with well-trained teaching assistants, who make significant contributions to the learning of pupils.
- The school is led effectively by the headteacher and a highly motivated senior management team which has made good contributions to school improvement.
- The governing body has improved its contribution to the leadership of the school since the last inspection. Governors have a good working knowledge of the school's strengths and improvement priorities, and are developing good links with parents, carers and teachers.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers' planning does not always take into account sufficiently the different needs of pupils in their learning. Where it does, some teachers do not move pupils quickly enough to attempt more challenging work.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their independent learning skills.
- Some marking of work in English is exemplary, but this is not matched in other subjects by most teachers.
- In spite of improvement in attainment, there is not enough focus in mathematics on pupils applying their knowledge of number to solving everyday mathematical problems.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 19 lessons taught by nine teachers. Five lessons were observed jointly with either the headteacher or other senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with pupils, the headteacher, deputy headteacher, members of the management team, four members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school's work. They examined the school's improvement plans and its checks on how well it is doing, safeguarding arrangements, health and safety records, school policies, external evaluations of the school's effectiveness and a range of pupils' work.
- Inspectors took account of 44 responses to the online Parent View survey, as well as a letter from a family support worker, and a telephone discussion with the school's improvement consultant.
- The inspectors examined 29 questionnaire responses from members of staff.

Inspection team

Rodney Braithwaite, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Teresa Hill

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mark's Church of England Junior School is an average-sized primary school.
- Nearly all pupils are White British, the remainder coming from a range of other ethnic heritages.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is similar to the national average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional funding for looked after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children of service families) is below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching in the school so that pupils reach the very highest levels of which they are capable by:
 - building greater consistency in the way in which teachers plan for the different learning needs of all pupils and move them on quickly to higher challenges
 - ensuring that the high quality of marking of pupils' work seen in English is promoted in all subjects by all teachers
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their own independent learning skills with confidence.
- Ensure that improved achievement and progress of pupils in mathematics is sustained over time by:
 - enabling pupils throughout the school to develop higher levels of numerical understanding by learning as often as possible about how to solve everyday mathematical problems.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils begin the school in Year 3 with above-average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Since the last inspection, pupils have reached at least above-average standards by the end of Year 6 in these subjects, but this has varied year on year. In the last year, effective action has been taken to ensure that pupils consistently reach above-average levels.
- Evidence from books, lessons and school progress data makes it clear that pupils in all year groups are making good progress. Many are working at levels above those expected for their ages.
- Standards and progress in mathematics are both considerably improved. The school leadership accepts that in order for achievement to be outstanding in mathematics, the present attainment and progress must be sustained over time and not revert to inconsistency.
- In the past, this inconsistency has been caused by weaknesses in the understanding of pupils of how to solve everyday mathematical problems, and by pupils being given too few opportunities to develop these skills.
- Pupils have achieved well in reading for some time. Pupils in Year 6, for example, can talk with gusto about their reading of books about the French Revolution, adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, and stories like *The Pit and the Pendulum*, and *Warhorse*. An enthusiasm for reading is common in all years.
- Writing attainment and achievement have risen strongly as a result of new strategies for the involvement of pupils being successfully applied.
- The school provides good opportunities for pupils to learn effectively across a range of subjects such as music and history. Pupils in Year 6 make good progress in science, and applied their knowledge well when deciding where mould caused by microorganisms was most likely to be found in school.
- Pupils with disabilities or special educational needs are very well supported because their learning needs are well managed and identified at an early stage. They are achieving well as a result.
- Pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium make good progress because the school is providing for their particular needs effectively. Their attainment, however, has been variable and the gap in attainment in English and mathematics between them and other pupils is not yet consistently narrowing.
- In English in 2012, for example, all of these pupils reached the national average by the end of Year 6. However, only half of this small group reached expected levels in mathematics, although these pupils reached above-average levels.
- Evidence from this inspection indicates that the school's action in the last year is enabling most of these pupils to make faster progress, with some already reaching or exceeding the attainment of other pupils.

The quality of teaching is good

- Nearly all teaching is good in the school, and occasionally has outstanding features. Examples of this were seen in several classes where pupils were writing lengthy stories, which happens on a regular basis. In Year 4, for instance, pupils were stimulated by a sound track of mysterious noises, which helped to make their writing about an old tunnel imaginative and exciting.
- This focus has resulted in significant improvement in writing skills in all years.
- Teaching is not outstanding overall, though, because there is inconsistency in the planning of different learning activities to promote improvement in the learning of all abilities of pupils. Sometimes, pupils do not move on to planned challenging activities quickly enough, and spend too much time, as one put it, 'getting ticks'.

- Although pupils in Year 3 in an information and communication technology lesson all worked effectively and independently in their investigation of space, this type of independent learning does not happen often enough across the school. Most pupils are more than capable of developing their individual research and learning skills when given the opportunity.
- Strengths in teaching include good questioning skills which encourage pupils' development of speaking skills, and teachers' creation of a positive climate for learning which encourages pupils to be enthusiastic and motivated.
- Intervention is effectively targeted for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs, and for pupils receiving pupil premium funding. This was particularly effective in pupils' work on their extended writing topics, when many benefited from the very competent support of teaching assistants.
- Teachers are working successfully to promote a wide range of learning activities across all subjects, which is improving pupils' greater application of basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology.
- Since the last inspection, there has been good improvement in the collection and use of data information, and in the tracking of pupils' progress over time. Pupils also have a better understanding of their learning targets, often through discussion with their teacher.
- There is some excellent helpful and developmental marking of pupils' work, especially in English in Year 6, but the impact of marking in driving improvement across all subjects and in all years still varies. Some marking fails to correct basic errors.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils behave well both in and out of school, as shown by the compliments of the public when they are on educational or residential visits. Pupils say that the behaviour of most pupils is good, although one or two sometimes talk too much in class, 'which is not allowed'.
- Pupils have consistently enthusiastic attitudes to their learning and describe many interesting activities which they have enjoyed. These include a recent trip to Calais, making Tudor houses, and participation in numerous school clubs during and after school.
- Although good, behaviour is not yet outstanding because occasionally pupils are not fully engaged in some lessons, and some pupils have concerns about the behaviour of a few others during lunchtimes.
- Pupils show few concerns about bullying, and can quote extensively their learning from the 'anti-bullying days' provided by the school. They have sound knowledge of the dangers of cyber-bullying; pupils in Year 3 said forcibly, 'Never put your name or address on the net or a phone.'
- Their behaviour is enhanced by the school's strong commitment to spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. One said to an inspector, 'I really like assemblies like the ones where we have spiritual talks about values.'
- There are good links with a wide range of external agencies to meet the needs of the most vulnerable pupils, and to support families in difficult circumstances. An external support worker wrote, 'It is important to recognise good practice and I have been impressed with the response and involvement of the staff.'
- For several years, attendance has been above average, and punctuality is excellent. There have been no pupil exclusions for well over a year.
- Parents, carers and staff are highly positive about the behaviour of pupils in the school, and the school's provisions for safety and security.

The leadership and management are good

- The development of teaching and learning in the school is led purposefully by the headteacher, with good support from the deputy headteacher and assistant headteachers. This has led to especially good improvement in the teaching of disabled pupils and pupils with special

educational needs.

- The improved quality of teaching has been due to better analysis by leaders of teachers' performance, and the introduction and use of rigorous and informative data information on the progress of pupils.
- The school's track record of improvements to teaching, the development of wider learning opportunities in all subjects, considerably better governance and the maintenance of pupils' good attitudes to learning suggests the school has a good capacity for further improvement.
- The leadership and management of the school are not yet outstanding because over time leaders have not ensured that all pupils make consistently high progress, especially in mathematics. In spite of some progress, leaders have not yet provided sufficient independent learning opportunities for pupils.
- The training needs of staff are incorporated into school planning, and performance targets are closely matched to the needs of the school. The school is also developing more-thorough links of performance to teachers' pay awards.
- The school's evaluation of its own performance is largely accurate and based on sound evidence, although in parts it can be generous rather than robust.
- More-stimulating learning opportunities, consistently good behaviour and an effective approach to social development have strengthened the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education so that it is good.
- School leaders promote equal opportunities and good relationships well. This ensures there is no discrimination through gender, ethnic heritage, disability or special educational needs.
- Use of the school pupil premium funding is closely monitored by leaders and is leading to improved and consistent progress for these pupils. The funding has been used to provide individual support, especially in writing and mathematics, better resources, family support, and the provision of extra learning opportunities out of the usual school day.
- The local authority has had few concerns about the school for several years. Its contributions have usually been on request by the school.
- The school has a good partnership with parents and carers. A small number expressed concerns but these were unspecified so could not be followed up by inspectors.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Since the last inspection, governors have greatly improved their contribution to school leadership. They are more confident in challenging school leaders, because they have a greater knowledge of standards and achievement, and they work closely with staff, particularly subject leaders. They are frequent visitors to school and provide a regular governor link to parents and carers. Governors are now, with training, developing a better knowledge of linking pay to performance, especially when relating the quality of teaching to pupils' progress against school targets. They know what is being done to reward good teachers and tackle any underperformance. Governors make sure that safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and that school policies are carefully and regularly reviewed.

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	115712
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	413156

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	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	237
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Bennett
Headteacher	Lynne Bailey
Date of previous school inspection	22–23 June 2010
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