

St Stephen's Junior School

Hales Drive, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7AD

Inspection dates 16–17 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	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.

- Good teaching ensures that pupils with different levels of ability achieve well throughout the school. There are examples of outstanding teaching in each year group.
- Pupils feel very safe and have few concerns about bullying. They behave sensibly and maturely around the school, and show very positive attitudes to learning in lessons.
- Teaching and achievement are improving because senior leaders are highly ambitious for their school, manage the staff well and constantly strive to bring all teaching up to the level of the best.
- Members of the governing body know their school well and hold leaders firmly to account for raising achievement and improving teaching.
- The curriculum includes a wide variety of experiences, which enable pupils to achieve well in a range of subjects, including art and history as well as English and mathematics. This helps to ensure that pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- The excellent breakfast and after-school club enables those pupils who attend it to benefit from an extremely safe, supportive and stimulating environment.
- The school works effectively for the benefit of pupils with other local organisations. Parents are highly supportive of the school and comment extremely favourably on the quality of the care which the school gives their children.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Activities in lessons do not always fully engage pupils and so progress sometimes slows.
- Teachers' written comments on pupils' work do not always include sufficient detail to show pupils exactly what they need to do to improve their work.
- Middle leaders who are responsible for subjects or age groups, several of whom are new to their posts, do not yet all contribute fully to improving teaching and to raising pupils' achievement.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 17 lessons, three of them together with school leaders, observing all the teachers present in the school during the inspection at least once. They also looked at pupils' written work, listened to pupils read, made shorter visits to a number of other lessons, attended an assembly, and visited the school's breakfast and after-school club.
- Inspectors held discussions with groups of, and individual, pupils; two members, including the Chair, of the Governing Body; members of staff; and a group of parents.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school's information on pupils' attainment and progress, and data on attendance. They examined safeguarding procedures and records of the school's own lesson observations, as well as self-evaluation and planning documents.
- In planning and carrying out the inspection, inspectors took account of 56 responses to the online survey (Parent View), which were submitted before and during the inspection, and 23 questionnaires completed by members of the teaching and support staff.

Inspection team

Robin Gaff, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Vanessa Tomlinson

Additional Inspector

Julie Sackett

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average sized primary school.
- A large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- About one in six pupils is supported through school action, which is above the national average. About one in thirty pupils is supported at school action plus or has a statement of special educational needs. This proportion is much lower than average.
- The proportion of pupils, just over one in four, who are eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional funding provided for children in local authority care, children with a parent in the armed services and those who are known to be eligible for free school meals, is above the national average. There were no children from service families in last year's Year 6 classes, and there are none in the current Year 6.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- St Stephen's Junior School converted to academy status in January 2011. When its predecessor school was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding overall.
- There have been several changes of staff, including some affecting the composition of the senior leadership team, since January 2011.
- During this period, the headteacher and other members of staff have provided long-term support for two other local primary schools.
- The school operates a breakfast and after-school club for a large number of its own pupils, as well as some from other schools.
- The school's governing body is responsible for the management of an on-site nursery, which is subject to separate inspection arrangements.
- The school shares its site with an infant school, which will also be inspected separately.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in English and mathematics still further and accelerate pupils' progress by ensuring that all:
 - teachers include sufficiently stimulating activities in their lessons to capture and maintain pupils' interest and enable them to make consistently rapid progress
 - teachers' written comments on pupils' work are always detailed and specific enough to show pupils the next steps they need to take to make their work better
 - middle leaders gain the experience and skills they need to contribute effectively to improving the quality of teaching and to raising achievement in the areas for which they are responsible.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils join the school with levels of attainment which are generally in line with those found nationally. By the end of Key Stage 2, the standards they reach in reading, writing and mathematics are above the national average. Although this was not the case in 2012 for mathematics, leaders have identified and successfully addressed the causes of this dip by changing the methods which teachers use in this subject. This has resulted in rising standards throughout the school.
- Pupils from all ethnic backgrounds make good progress from their starting points. In particular, the proportion of more able pupils who have gained Level 5 or higher in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6 has been above the national average in recent years. The school's own reliable information about pupils' progress, as well as inspectors' observations, confirm that lower ability pupils also make good progress.
- This was demonstrated, for example, in a Year 4 mathematics lesson, in which a group of lower attaining pupils, including some who are eligible for pupil premium funding, made excellent progress in learning how to recognise repeating patterns in sequences of numbers. This was because the teacher provided them with different series of problems which gradually increased in difficulty, carefully explaining the technique they needed to use. She reinforced their confidence by using pupils' work as examples and praising them for their achievement.
- The standards reached in English by those pupils who were eligible for the pupil premium, as shown by their performance in the 2012 national tests, indicated that they were just under a term behind other pupils in the school and all pupils nationally. In mathematics, these pupils' results showed that they were about two and a half terms behind other pupils in the school and almost two terms behind all pupils nationally. The school has made good use of the extra pupil premium funding to provide additional classroom and out-of-school support for eligible pupils, which is enabling them to make good progress. As a result, the gap is narrowing between their attainment and that of all pupils nationally.
- The learning and progress of disabled students and those with special educational needs are also good because teachers plan activities which are well tailored to their individual needs, and teaching assistants ensure that these pupils are fully included in classroom activities.
- Pupils say they enjoy reading, and are keen to talk with visitors about the books they have read recently. Most read accurately, fluently and confidently, and those pupils who find reading harder nevertheless persevere and show that they understand the sense of what they have read.
- Pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress in a wide range of subjects, including art, as demonstrated by the high quality displays of pupils' work, such as a three-dimensional version of Picasso's *Guernica*, around the school.
- When, occasionally, pupils make slower progress in lessons, this is usually because the teacher has not provided them with sufficiently stimulating activities.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers include a good variety of tasks in their lessons which are well matched to pupils' different interests and abilities. They have high expectations of pupils in terms of both behaviour and work, making sure, for example, that tasks are pitched at the right level so that both higher and lower attaining pupils can make at least good progress.
- Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the different subjects they teach and ensure that lessons proceed at a good pace, so that little time is wasted.
- Teachers' use of questioning is consistently good and often outstanding. Teachers check carefully and at regular intervals to make sure that pupils have understood fully what they are meant to be learning as well as what their tasks entail. They also include more complex questions which enable pupils to reflect on what they have learned, and skilfully use pupils'

answers to extend and to develop their learning. Teachers also regularly modify classroom activities when their questioning reveals that pupils have made slower or faster progress than they had anticipated.

- Occasionally, teachers do not ensure that pupils are fully interested in and focused on learning, because they take too long to explain activities, or do not give pupils enough opportunities to learn for themselves and from others, resulting in slower progress.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and thoroughly, and give pupils good opportunities to respond to their comments. Pupils' written responses often show how much they have learned from teachers' feedback. However, teachers' comments are not always detailed or specific enough to enable pupils to know exactly what they have done well or what they need to do to improve the quality of their work.
- Teachers make good use of classroom assistants and brief them in detail about how they are to help the pupils for whom they are responsible. Teaching assistants, through their skilful and dedicated approach, make a significant contribution to the good progress made by disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils report, and staff confirm, that pupils are cooperative and keen to learn in lessons, and that examples of disruptive behaviour are few and far between. Pupils play safely and sensibly in the playground at breaks and lunchtimes, and show courtesy and consideration for one another as they move around the school, for example holding doors open and waiting their turn.
- On the rare occasions when pupils' behaviour in lessons is less good, this generally results from lack of concentration due to insufficiently engaging activities.
- Pupils understand and fully support the school's anti-bullying policy. One said that bullying hardly ever happens because 'we all signed a pledge!' They know about verbal, physical and cyber bullying and confirm that staff deal with any instances quickly and effectively.
- Almost all the parents who responded to the Parent View survey agreed that their children felt safe in school and very few expressed concerns about behaviour or the way in which the school deals with bullying. One parent stated that she had raised a bullying issue with the school and that it had been resolved 'by lunchtime on the same day'.
- The school has been very successful in improving the behaviour of the small number of pupils for whom it had been a cause for concern, by working effectively with parents and, when appropriate, with outside professionals. As a result, there have been no exclusions in recent years.
- Pupils' attendance has been consistently above average and has risen over the last few years, because the school has succeeded in helping to overcome the causes of the persistent absenteeism of the very few pupils concerned.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher are both passionately committed to ensuring that the school enables pupils to achieve as well as they can and develop as confident, fully rounded individuals. Their different, complementary skills mean that they form a very effective team. Together with the governing body, they have accurately identified the school's strengths and are well aware of what needs to be done to make it outstanding.
- Working closely with the neighbouring infant school, leaders have considerably strengthened the school's systems for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. They have ensured that the information they gain is used by all teachers to inform the way they teach individuals and groups of pupils. As a result, lower attaining pupils, as well as those who are eligible for pupil premium support, are now making accelerated progress.
- This, together with the good achievement of disabled pupils and those with special educational

needs and the happy and harmonious relationships between pupils from different backgrounds, demonstrates the school's success in promoting equality of opportunity and in tackling the causes of any potential discrimination.

- By regularly observing lessons and examining pupils' work, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have gained an excellent understanding of the quality of teaching in each year group and subject and have improved its quality across the school. They have extremely high expectations of the staff and set ambitious targets in terms of raising pupils' achievement.
- School leaders recognise, however, that they have not yet ensured that all middle leaders, several of whom have recently been appointed to their posts or to the school, have gained the experience and skills they need in order to play a full part in improving teaching and learning in the year groups or subjects for which they have a particular responsibility.
- The school, nevertheless, has established very effective systems for managing the performance of staff, and teachers new to the profession report that they are very well supported by all their colleagues. One of them stated that the level of encouragement and help she had been given by senior leaders was 'amazing'. Staff are united in supporting leaders' drive for improvement, and morale is high.
- The broad and balanced curriculum, including the wide variety of out-of-school activities, enables all groups of pupils to achieve well and prepares them very successfully for their transfer to secondary education. In particular, the school ensures that pupils receive a good grounding in a range of subjects, including history and modern foreign languages.
- This is enhanced by the strong partnerships the school has established with local secondary schools. Its well-established links with schools abroad, including in Turkey and the Czech Republic, together with the range of opportunities pupils have to learn about the different cultures and traditions represented in the United Kingdom, make a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The breakfast and after-school club provides all those pupils who attend with an extremely safe and supportive environment, and an excellent range of stimulating activities.
- As an academy, the school no longer receives direct support from the local authority. It has, however, developed strong and effective links with other schools, some of them in different authorities, as well as with local universities. This has helped leaders to improve the quality of teaching. They in turn have provided much-appreciated support for two other local schools.
- A very large majority of parents agree or strongly agree that their children are well looked after, and that the school gives them valuable information about their children's progress and responds well to any concerns they raise. Almost all would recommend the school to another parent.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body have an accurate knowledge and understanding of the school's performance, including in comparison with other schools, and of the quality of teaching. They know how pay is related to teachers' achievement of their own and the school's targets, and how the pupil premium funding is being used to improve the achievement of eligible pupils. The governing body includes a good range of experience and expertise, and its members regularly update their skills by undertaking relevant training. Governors hold leaders rigorously to account for their performance, and for ensuring that the performance of staff is well managed. They ensure that the school meets all requirements for safeguarding pupils. They also keep a close eye on the school's finances, making sure that expenditure is firmly focused on meeting pupils' needs. Their effective stewardship of and ambition for the school, together with leaders' success in raising the quality of teaching and of pupils' performance, indicate the school's capacity for further improvement.

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	136393
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	412444

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	376
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vic Hester
Headteacher	Stuart Pywell
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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