

The Mary Towerton School

Water End Road, Studley Green, High Wycombe, HP14 3XN

Inspection dates 4–5 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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:

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because it is too variable. Teachers do not always use assessment information to prepare lessons that match the needs of all pupils, nor do they provide clear guidance that helps pupils improve their work.
- Pupils do not achieve as well in writing as they do in reading and mathematics. They do not consistently form letters correctly and neatly, and have not mastered basic punctuation skills well enough to ensure their writing always makes sense.
- Pupils' skills in linking letters and sounds are at lower levels than expected for their age throughout the school and as a result they do not use these skills effectively to help them spell words correctly when they write.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage do not achieve well in literacy and mathematics because they do not have enough opportunities to practise basic skills.
- Pupils lack a clear understanding of what they need to master to reach the next steps in learning literacy and mathematics.
- The information gathered about pupils' achievement lacks sufficient detail to enable leaders to act quickly when pupils' progress slows.
- Governors rely heavily on the headteacher to provide information about how well the school is doing.
- New leadership roles and responsibilities, recently shared between the few staff, are not yet sufficiently developed to raise standards.

The school has the following strengths:

- The new headteacher acted quickly to tackle the recommendations from the last inspection. She has established a firm foundation for further improvement due to her drive and determination, her accurate assessment of how well the school is doing and her clear plan of action, guidance and support for staff and governors.
- The new behaviour policy is implemented consistently so that pupils' behaviour is good and has improved significantly over the year. Pupils feel safe in this small caring school.
- The headteacher has won the wholehearted support of parents and carers.
- Robust systems to manage the performance of teaching staff are in place.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 10 lessons, all of which were joint observations with the headteacher. In addition, the inspector made a number of other short visits to lessons, all in partnership with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with pupils, two governors, a local authority representative and school staff, including the leader in charge of provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. In addition, some pupils read to the inspector.
- The inspector took account of the 17 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection and spoke to some parents and carers before school.
- The inspector observed the school's work, and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own information on pupils' current progress, planning and monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance and safeguarding records.

Inspection team

Liz Kounnou, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than most schools, and has two classes, one for the Early Years Foundation Stage and one for pupils in Key Stage 1.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well below average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for looked after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils who have a parent or carer in the armed services.
- The proportion of pupils who are of minority ethnic heritage is well below average, and very few speak English as an additional language. A very few pupils are from Traveller families.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action, through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is much lower than average. This group mainly has specific learning difficulties or physical disabilities.
- All the teaching staff were appointed from September 2012, including a new headteacher. In addition there have been significant changes to staffing and leadership roles during the year.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - making sure that the different activities that teachers provide are precisely matched to pupils' needs and help them reach their next steps in learning
 - increasing the impact of the new marking policy so that teachers' comments consistently point pupils towards the next steps in learning and pupils take responsibility to act on their teachers' advice
 - setting targets for pupils to use in their learning so that they know what they must master to move on in their reading, writing and mathematics
 - setting out the small steps to success that will help pupils to reach each lesson objective and check their own work.
- Raise achievement in writing in Years 1 and 2, and in literacy and mathematics in the Early Years Foundation Stage, by:
 - making sure that pupils know how to link letters and sounds confidently for their age and how to use these skills to spell words accurately or plausibly
 - making sure that pupils in Years 1 and 2 and children in the Early Years Foundation Stage consistently form letters correctly and neatly whenever they write, and that more-able pupils consistently use a fluent joined handwriting style by the end of Year 2
 - making sure that pupils consistently use simple punctuation when they write so that their writing always makes sense
 - making sure that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have plenty of opportunities to learn and record basic literacy and mathematics skills, and that the activities provided for children to select for themselves include opportunities to use and practise these skills independently.
- Increase the impact of school leaders and governors on raising achievement by:
 - analysing information gathered from teachers' assessments in detail so that leaders quickly

- identify any patterns that emerge and take prompt action when pupils' progress slows
- strengthening the skills of newly established leaders in charge of specific aspects or subjects so that they have a greater impact on raising standards
 - strengthening the skills of the governing body so that governors make accurate comparisons of how well various groups of pupils are doing in relation to others in school and to similar groups nationally, including those supported by the pupil premium grant, and increasing governors' capacity to hold school leaders to account.

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

requires improvement

- Very small cohorts in each year group mean that comparisons with national standards and rates of progress are not fully reliable. Pupils' achievement requires improvement because it is variable. Reading and mathematics standards are typically above average by the end of Year 2. Standards in writing continue to be lower than could be expected given pupils' starting points.
- Pupils' skills in linking sounds and letters (phonics) have improved but remain lower than could be expected for their age throughout the school. This hampers their ability to spell words correctly. Most use simple patterns, for example writing three letter words correctly, but many struggle to master more difficult spelling patterns.
- Pupils' handwriting books demonstrate that they are able to form letters correctly when working with firm guidance from staff. They do not transfer these skills readily to other writing tasks so that their writing is often ill formed and untidy. The most able pupils rarely use a joined handwriting style in their work.
- Most pupils can explain how to use simple punctuation, such as capital letters and full stops, but many do not regularly use punctuation appropriately when they are writing. They often write enthusiastically but do not sequence their ideas in a clear order so that on too many occasions their writing does not make sense.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage learn how to be independent and how to work together very well. They show great skills in organising themselves and resolving problems. Their development in literacy and mathematics is not as strong.
- Many pupils are well supported at home with reading, and parents and carers regularly come into school at the start of each day to choose new books with their children. Pupils are enthusiastic about stories they hear at school, and are currently engrossed in pirate tales. Most read with enjoyment and competency. Lower-attaining readers find working out words with more complex spelling patterns difficult and this means that they make slow progress.
- Typically there are only one or two pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs in each year group. This is also the case for other groups such as those supported by the pupil premium grant, those from ethnic minority heritage, those learning to speak English as an additional language and those from Traveller families. The small class sizes mean that pupils from all these groups regularly receive one-to-one help when necessary, or work in small groups with teaching assistants to support them. As a result, their progress is in line with all other pupils in the school.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching varies right across the school. Teachers regularly provide different activities for each group and set tasks at various levels. However, teachers do not always make use of the detailed information they gather from assessing pupils' achievements when designing tasks. This means that pupils do not always have opportunities to practise and develop the knowledge and skills they have not fully mastered.
- Staff worked hard to implement a new marking policy and regularly provide guidance to help pupils understand how they can improve their work. Special symbols are used so that pupils know the most important thing to think about next time. Pupils are not yet acting on teachers' advice quickly enough and as a result comments often repeat the same advice many times, particularly in writing, where pupils are often reminded to include simple punctuation but do not put this into practice.
- Targets for pupils to work on next are displayed on classroom walls but pupils do not use this information to help them improve their work. Few pupils know how to reach the next steps in their learning, for example they cannot explain what they need to master to be a better reader.

Teachers do not often refer to targets in their marking.

- Lesson objectives are almost always shared with pupils so that they know what they are going to learn in literacy and mathematics lessons. Teachers often tailor these for mixed-age pupils to ensure there is an appropriate level of challenge. Nonetheless, pupils rarely know the small steps they must take to succeed in reaching the learning objectives and this limits their ability to check how well they have done.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage has been transformed since the last inspection. Children often manage their own activities and develop high levels of independence, cooperation and curiosity. There are opportunities for children to use the refurbished outdoor area throughout the day. Teaching in small groups often helps children practise basic literacy and mathematics skills but sometimes this work lacks challenge so that children's progress slows. While many activities that children select for themselves are enjoyable, few provide opportunities for them to practise basic literacy and mathematics skills independently.
- Improvements in teaching phonics have increased attainment levels, but these sessions are not sufficiently fast paced or detailed enough to ensure that pupils throughout the school master key skills at a faster rate.
- Teaching for pupils who find learning more difficult is also variable. It is often precisely designed to help them master new learning, particularly in mathematics, but on occasions pupils require a great deal of support to complete the tasks because they are too complicated or uninteresting.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- There has been notable success in tackling concerns about behaviour that parents and carers raised at the start of the year. Pupils are fully familiar with the new behaviour policy. They know exactly how they must behave and what will happen if their behaviour falls below school expectations. They must complete a 'think sheet' to reflect on any seriously unacceptable behaviour. All staff implement the policy with great consistency; consequently, pupils behave well in most lessons and around the school. Parents and carers responding to the online questionnaire, Parent View, expressed complete confidence in the management of behaviour throughout the school.
- Pupils feel safe at school and say there is almost no bullying. They know precisely what to do if they have any concerns, for example about name calling, and are confident that staff will help them sort out any difficulties promptly. Well-planned sessions and assemblies explain most common forms of bullying; nonetheless, pupils do not fully understand about or comprehend cyber bullying. Pupils express great indignation about discrimination and say that all adults treat them fairly.
- There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to be active and they show high levels of responsibility when organising and sharing equipment, for example when working together with a set of fascinating three dimensional shapes that open out to show the net. Some activities lack the necessary challenge to keep pupils engaged. On occasions pupils begin to fidget and wriggle, usually when they have been sitting on the carpet for too long with fewer opportunities to be active learners.
- The school system of awarding gemstones to promote the development of social and moral values, such as kindness, respect, good manners, teamwork, patience and effort, gives pupils a strong sense of personal responsibility for their age. The school council members are elected and confidently influence school improvement. They are currently purchasing a sandpit having first helped to raise money for this project. Pupils' ideas and contributions are highly valued.
- Rigorous systems to follow up absence have resulted in a significant improvement in the rate of attendance. The small numbers in the school mean that absence for necessary medical attention represents a high proportion overall. Consequently, although there is strong improvement, attendance remains below average.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- All the teaching staff were appointed to take up their posts in September 2012, and since that time there have been changes in the number of days each teacher works and in allocating leadership responsibilities. The new headteacher has established a sense of purpose and urgency directed at bringing about rapid improvements.
- As part of the headteacher's strategy to improve the quality of teaching across the school a robust system to manage teachers' performance has been set up this year. This includes regular meetings, challenging targets and a clear link between salary and performance. Higher standards of phonics skills across the school result from a clear drive to improve teaching in this area.
- A significant number of policies and systems have been updated to improve school practice and ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to do well. The new headteacher put in place a simple system to record each pupil's progress and attainment that allows school leaders and class teachers to check that pupils are on track to reach their targets. Information from the system is used to inform regular meetings between the headteacher and class teachers when the performance of each pupil is discussed. This has quickly identified discrepancies in prior assessment information, but is not sufficiently sophisticated to allow school leaders to analyse the progress of different groups easily and how these compare to others, both within the school and nationally.
- New leadership roles and responsibilities were assigned in February 2013, for example to improve provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Individual plans are in place to show how each pupil will be supported and a programme of tailored interventions implemented to accelerate their progress. These initiatives are too recent to have an impact on raising standards and there is not yet a rigorous system to identify reasons for success or delay in learning.
- Good relationships have been fostered so that all parents and carers responding to the online questionnaire, Parent View, indicated that they would recommend the school, and all believe the school is well led and managed. Parental support has been gained due to improved communication explaining the many changes, while retaining a strong commitment to maintaining a happy and safe environment so that pupils benefit from the community ethos in this small school.
- The lively curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral and social development well. Curiosity is nurtured and pupils have a great deal of fun. The energetic and hugely enjoyable modern dance club, attended by more boys than girls, is a good example of how the school promotes a love of culture and arts. Nonetheless, few cultural opportunities help pupils develop an understanding of diverse cultures within Great Britain and around the world.
- The local authority has provided good support to the new headteacher so that the school's updated evaluation of how well it is doing is accurate.

■ **The governance of the school:**

Governors ask detailed questions about school improvement at their meetings and are developing a clearer understanding of how well pupils are doing due to the high-quality information and reports they receive from the headteacher. These reports include up-to-date information about the development of teaching. Currently governors rely heavily on the headteacher to interpret national and school information about pupils' attainment and progress and this limits their ability to hold school leaders to account. The pupil premium grant is very small because there are very few pupils in this group. Funding is used to enable pupils to access additional clubs but in the past there was not a clear evaluation of the impact this had on accelerating pupils' progress; more robust systems are in place this year with a clearer focus on raising standards. There has not been time for a full cycle of staff performance management under the school's new arrangements to be completed; however, governors are

kept well informed of the process.

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	110208
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	411847

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	42
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs B Sparks
Headteacher	Mrs J Barnett
Date of previous school inspection	4-5 November 2009
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