

St Nicholas Church of England Primary School

Sarajac Avenue, East Challow, Wantage, OX12 9RY

Inspection dates 18–19 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	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.

- Children start school in the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills below those expected, but they make consistently good progress throughout the school. They achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics.
- All groups of pupils achieve well because teaching is good.
- Teachers plan interesting lessons that meet the needs of all pupils, who say that they enjoy coming to school. They read widely and confidently, and use their reading, speaking and listening skills well in other subjects. Music and physical education are particular strengths. Pupils are well prepared for secondary school.
- Behaviour is good because pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning, take their responsibilities seriously and are considerate towards each other. They feel safe and well supported, and the school is a caring community in which pupils feel nurtured and valued.
- Leadership and management at all levels are good. The interim headteacher, Interim Executive Board and middle leaders have worked tirelessly to address the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. The school has made rapid and secure improvement as a result.
- The school works very well with parents and carers, who hold the school in high regard.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Although teaching is consistently good, not enough is outstanding.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to use their literacy skills to write at length or to use their numeracy skills to solve everyday problems in mathematics.
- Interim arrangements for the leadership and management of the school have not yet been made permanent.
- The plans of the subjects that pupils learn are new and need to be consolidated.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector evaluated the quality of teaching in each class. He observed eight lessons taught by four teachers. Some lessons were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Discussions were held with pupils, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the interim headteacher, the headteacher of the partnership secondary school, staff and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector observed many aspects of the school's work. He heard pupils read and scrutinised their work in exercise books and on classroom wall displays.
- The inspector looked at a number of documents, including the Interim Executive Board minutes, plans for what pupils learn in each subject and the school's future development, the school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe, pupils' attendance records, records of how pupils' progress and attainment are checked and tracked, and records of how the school checks on the quality of teaching.
- The views of parents and carers were taken into account through the scrutiny of the 30 responses to the school's own parent questionnaire and a meeting with a representative group of parents and carers. There were no responses to the online Parent View survey.
- Staff views were taken into consideration by looking at questionnaires completed by 10 staff members.

Inspection team

Chris Nye, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- The school is a much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a Reception class. There is one mixed-age class in Key Stage 1 and two mixed-age classes in Key Stage 2.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action is similar to other schools. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus is below average. They have moderate learning difficulties. No pupils currently have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium is slightly above average. This is additional funding for children looked after by the local authority, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those with a parent serving in the armed forces. In this school, all pupils supported by pupil premium are those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average, and these pupils are confident English speakers.
- There is a private nursery on the school site, but this is not managed by the governors and is the subject of separate inspection arrangements.
- The school was placed in special measures in April 2012. Since then, the headteacher has been replaced by an interim headteacher and the governing body with an Interim Executive Board. The headteacher is initially contracted until August 2014 and the Interim Executive Board will continue until the school converts to an academy, which is expected to be at some point in 2014. Half the teaching staff have been replaced over the past year.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching so that pupils' achievement continues to improve by:
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to write at length across all the subjects that they study
 - ensuring that pupils routinely use their numeracy skills to solve everyday mathematical problems.
- Consolidate recent improvements in leadership and management by:
 - embedding the recently developed plans regarding the subjects that pupils learn
 - enacting plans to convert interim leadership arrangements into permanent ones.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- The school has successfully reversed a history of underachievement and there is secure evidence that all groups of pupils are making rapid and sustained progress in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, gaps between their attainment and that of pupils in other schools nationally are rapidly closing.
- Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They start school in the Reception class with skills that are below those expected for their age, especially in their communication, language, literacy and mathematical skills. Children make good progress and most attain the expected levels by the time they transfer to Key Stage 1. In the current year, children are on track to attain as well as children in other schools locally and nationally, although slightly fewer than average are expected to achieve this in mathematics. Nevertheless, this is good progress.
- In Key Stage 1, previous underachievement has been successfully reversed, and pupils now make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) and early reading are well taught and this year pupils in Year 1 have done considerably better than previously in the phonics screening. This is because teachers and support staff have been very well trained in teaching phonics and early reading.
- In Year 2, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics have improved significantly this year, even though the proportion of pupils with special educational needs is high in this year group. Pupils have made good progress and almost all are on track to meet or exceed expected levels. This was illustrated during the inspection by the very high standard in writing that pupils were achieving in reports that they were writing about a recent school trip. Because their attainment at the start of their time in Key Stage 1 was low, this represents good progress.
- Pupils' achievement in Key Stage 2 has improved significantly this year and is now good in every year group in reading, writing and mathematics. In last summer's Year 6 national tests, as a result of intensive extra support, all pupils attained the expected levels in English and mathematics, and almost half exceeded this in English, with more than half attaining the higher level in mathematics. Inspection evidence suggests that this strong picture has been further built upon this year, with the current Year 6 cohort on track to do slightly better than average in English and mathematics. Since this year group entered Key Stage 2 with attainment well below average, this indicates that they have made at least good progress.
- This strong picture is reflected across Key Stage 2 as a whole, where pupils are making good progress, particularly in reading. In spelling, grammar and punctuation, attainment is lower, but progress is good overall. The school has recently introduced opportunities for pupils to write at greater length, and although this has yet to be fully embedded, early indications of improved standards in writing suggest that this is a positive step.
- The introduction of an effective calculation policy has had a very positive impact on improving pupils' acquisition of numeracy skills and accelerating their progress. However, although achievement in mathematics is rapidly improving, some pupils are not yet using numeracy skills to confidently solve problems in mathematics.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics because they are well supported by teaching programmes which meet their individual needs. As a result, the gaps between what they and other pupils can do are rapidly closing. Pupils who are supported by pupil premium funding also make good progress and attain as well as other pupils in the school and nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils are encouraged to read widely and often. In lessons, a strong emphasis is placed on developing reading, writing, speaking, listening and numeracy skills across all the subjects that they study. As a result, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Almost all the parents and carers who responded to the school's own recent survey, and those who spoke to the inspector, said that they felt their children made good progress. The pupils who met inspectors also expressed very positive views about their learning and the progress that

they make.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The overall quality of teaching in all subjects, including English and mathematics, and across all key stages, is good. Although no outstanding teaching was observed during the inspection, none was inadequate or required improvement, and the inspector agreed with the school's view that teaching has rapidly and securely improved since the last inspection. Teaching is not yet outstanding because opportunities for pupils to write at length have only recently been introduced, and are not fully embedded. In addition, the school rightly recognises the need for teaching to identify more opportunities in lessons for pupils to apply and practise using their numeracy skills in solving practical everyday problems.
- Lessons are well structured and take good account of how well pupils learned in previous lessons. Teachers make good use of assessment information to ensure that their teaching is pitched accurately to meet the pupils' wide-ranging needs, including those who have a disability or special educational needs. Activities are challenging, purposeful, imaginative and engage the pupils' interest well. For example, in one lesson, pupils were enthusiastically writing their own versions of traditional tales which they will be making into story books for younger pupils. They were being particularly careful to ensure that they used words and sentences that younger pupils would be able to read and understand.
- Classrooms provide excellent learning environments and displays both celebrate pupils' achievements and enhance their learning. For example, a display of pupils' work on rocks and minerals demonstrated their high level of enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, geology.
- The parents and carers who met the inspector and who completed the school's survey expressed confidence in the quality of teaching. All who completed the survey said that they felt that teachers have high expectations and expect pupils to work hard. The inspector agrees with this view.
- Teachers and teaching assistants use questioning skilfully to challenge most pupils and extend their learning. They listen carefully to what pupils say and value their responses. Clear learning objectives are routinely shared with pupils and teaching is suitably adjusted to ensure that the brisk pace of learning is maintained.
- Reading is well taught because teachers and teaching assistants have a good understanding of how to teach phonics and early reading, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Pupils are enthusiastic and confident readers who are keen to share books with each other and with adults.
- A range of teaching methods are used to meet the individual needs of pupils, and good-quality resources, including new technologies, are used well to support teaching and pupils' learning. A minority of parents and carers were concerned that homework is not used well enough to support learning, but inspection evidence did not support this view.
- Teaching very effectively encourages pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- In all classes, the school's effective marking policy is consistently applied, and written feedback provides clear guidance to pupils on strengths, what needs to improve and how to achieve this. A strength is the way in which pupils are encouraged to assess their own and others' progress against clear ways of measuring success, and to respond to teachers' marking. This helps them to understand their learning targets, take responsibility for their own learning and develop their self-confidence and independence.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- The school is a caring, nurturing community in which pupils thrive physically, emotionally and socially. Pupils are consistently polite to adults and demonstrate high levels of care towards

each other. In class, they say that they enjoy their lessons, and most behave well, expressing positive attitudes towards their learning. In the playground and around school, pupils are friendly, behave sensibly and take their responsibilities seriously. For example, play leaders provide very good support for younger pupils during breaktimes.

- Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy coming to school, feel safe and are well cared for. Incidents of bullying are rare, but when they occur, they are effectively dealt with. Pupils have a clear understanding of racist behaviour and all forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and know what to do if they encounter them. The school's positive ethos encourages pupils' well-developed sense of right and wrong, and effectively supports their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development.
- Following the last inspection, well-considered behaviour policies have been developed that pupils understand and support. These are consistently applied across the school and have been the key driver in ensuring that residual weaknesses in pupils' behaviour have been effectively overcome.
- Parents and carers who met the inspector, and the overwhelming majority of those who completed the school's parent survey, were very positive about pupils' behaviour and how it is managed. All the parents and carers who responded to the survey felt that the school keeps their child safe.
- Overall, attendance has improved rapidly over the past year from below average to average. However, attendance is not as good in some year groups as in others, and the school is working effectively with parents and carers, and external agencies, such as the education welfare service, to improve attendance still further.

The leadership and management

are good

- Under the exceptionally strong leadership of the interim headteacher, the staff team have demonstrated a united determination to address all the weaknesses identified in the last inspection. They have been successful, and the speed with which robust improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement and behaviour have been made is very impressive. The school works as a cohesive team and is in a strong position to build further on the already rapidly improving quality of its provision.
- Leaders at all levels are realistic about what needs to improve, and the accurate self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is based upon rigorous monitoring of teaching and the evaluation of information about pupils' progress. Such data are also used to hold teachers to account and there are clear links between pupils' progress, teachers' performance targets and performance-related pay.
- The role of middle leaders has been developed and is now a key strength. Subject leaders have a very clear understanding of the strengths and what needs to improve in their areas of responsibility, and have taken effective action to improve standards, especially in English and mathematics.
- A strength is the support that leaders give to teachers' professional development, and the impact of this on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress is closely monitored.
- The school has recently developed plans for the subjects that pupils study that are wide-ranging and support their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Imaginative and well-structured topics take account of the mixed-age classes and provide opportunities for them to use literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology skills across a range of subjects. There is a strong emphasis on music and physical education, and subjects are enriched by a wide variety of clubs, activities and visits. However, these plans are new and are not yet sufficiently well established.
- The school works exceptionally well with parents and carers and the local community. There are close links to local churches, and the partnership with the nearby secondary school has been particularly effective, for example through sharing a special educational needs coordinator. This

has resulted in the significant improvement of provision and support for pupils with disabilities or special educational needs, and their progress has improved significantly as a result.

- During the time that the school was the subject of special measures, the local authority effectively contributed to the school's improvement journey through well-targeted support and rigorous and accurate monitoring. This support has rightly been reduced as the school has demonstrated its capacity to make secure improvements without external intervention.
- All safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements. They are securely in place and rigorously applied.
- Leaders at all levels are highly effectively at promoting equality of opportunity and are proactive in tackling all forms of discrimination.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The Interim Executive Board is very effective because it is well led and provides rigorous challenge to school leaders, and this has contributed effectively to the school's rapid improvement. Members of the Interim Executive Board are very skilled and experienced, and have a good understanding of how to use a range of performance data to question and challenge leaders, and so hold them effectively to account. They visit the school regularly and are kept well informed about the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress. Performance management systems that link to salary progression are securely established. They monitor closely the management of financial resources to ensure good value for money. For example, they have ensured that the budget will allow the current class structure and intervention programmes to continue next year. This is effectively supporting all pupils' learning, and particularly those who are supported by pupil premium or who have disabilities or special educational needs. The Interim Executive Board has set suitable performance targets for the headteacher which link clearly to the school's drive to improve standards.
- The Interim Executive Board is developing plans to ensure a smooth transition to a permanent governing body in 2014. Although the interim headteacher will be leading the school for at least another year, the Board rightly recognise that the interim nature of leadership and governance now needs to be resolved to ensure that the school consolidates and further develops the good progress that it has already made.

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	123147
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	420429

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	67
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Bob Wintringham
Headteacher	Andy Browne
Date of previous school inspection	23–24 April 2012
Telephone number	01235 763858
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