

St Mark's Church of England Primary School

Eccles Row, Eccles, Aylesford, Kent, ME20 7HS

Inspection dates 11–12 September 2013

| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Satisfactory | 3 |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| | 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 | | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching over time have not been good enough.
- Teaching, especially teachers' use of assessment, has not been effective in ensuring all pupils, including those with disabilities and those with special educational needs, make good progress.
- Teachers do not always use assessment data effectively to promptly identify and address underachievement.
- In some lessons, pupils' progress is hindered because those who show they can do the work are not always moved on quickly to harder things, especially the most able.
- Work is regularly marked but pupils do not always get the best advice on how to improve because the quality of comments is inconsistent between classes and subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- School leaders and governors have successfully taken steps to tackle weakness identified at the last inspection. Levels of attainment and progress are swiftly improving, including in writing, due in part to more systematic teaching of phonics (the sounds letters make) and increasing opportunities to write at length.
- Leaders, including governors, have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have taken effective action to eradicate inadequate teaching.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children make good progress across all areas of learning as a result of good teaching.
- Increasingly rigorous teacher assessment shows that more pupils are now making the progress that is expected of them and growing proportions are making faster progress in all years.
- Pupils are keen to learn and work hard. They enjoy school and their families are confident that they are happy and feel safe.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed seven lessons or part lessons. She was accompanied by the headteacher for all of these.
- She observed in all the classes. As well as looking at work in pupils' books during their classroom observations, she scrutinised a range of Year 2 and Year 6 pupils' work from the previous year.
- The inspector took account of the 23 responses to the online Parent View survey as well as talking to parents and carers informally during the inspection. The school's most recent surveys of parents and carers and pupils were also considered.
- She listened to pupils in Years 2 and 3 read individually and chatted to pupils informally throughout the inspection. Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons and at various times around the school.
- The inspector spoke with two school governors and held a telephone call with a representative of the local authority. She spoke to school staff, including senior and subject leaders. The views of six staff who completed the staff questionnaire were also taken into account.
- The school's work was observed and the inspector looked at documentation such as policies, including those relating to safeguarding, behaviour, and the school's development planning, as well as information on pupils' progress and attendance figures. She observed lunchtime as well as looking at the school's website.

Inspection team

Jacqueline Marshall, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- In this smaller than average sized primary school, the vast majority of pupils come from a White British background.
- The proportion of pupils receiving the pupil premium is below average and, in some year groups, only a very small number of pupils receive this support. The pupil premium is extra money given to schools by the government to support pupils in the care of the local authority, those known to be eligible for free school meals and those from service families.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and receive support through school action is average. The proportion being supported through school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is also average.
- The school meets the government's current floor targets, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Since the last inspection, almost half the teaching staff and a number of senior and middle leaders have been appointed, including the headteacher who took up the role of substantive headteacher in the summer term of 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is constantly good or better in order to secure consistently good progress over time for all pupils by:
 - ensuring all groups of pupils receive work and targeted teaching in lessons that are closely matched to their ability, particularly those with special educational needs
 - quickly moving pupils, especially the most able, on to more challenging work in lessons once they have demonstrated their understanding of what is being taught
 - making sure teachers' marking always reflects the best quality seen elsewhere in the school
 - improving teachers' understanding and use of assessment information to ensure they act quickly to tackle any potential underachievement by individual pupils or groups of pupils.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement is not good because not enough pupils make good progress over time. In the past, not enough pupils made the expected gains between Key Stage 1 and 2. Leaders accurately identified the issues and took effective action. Consequently, evidence from the inspection and school records show that standards in Key Stage 2 are set to rise this year.
- In the past, rates of progress varied between classes and subjects and this was linked to the quality of teaching. Progress in lessons in both Key Stage 1 and 2 is now typically good, due in part to changes in staffing and improvements to the quality of teaching. However, for some older pupils in Years 5 and 6, slower progress in the past may mean they have not made the amount of progress expected during Key Stage 2.
- The proportion of pupils making the expected progress across Key Stage 2 in writing is lower than expected. However, due to leaders' actions in improving teaching and the use of assessment to identify underachievement, progress in writing is rapidly improving. In mathematics and reading, there have been similar improvements to pupils' outcomes due to the school's actions since the last inspection. As a result, school information suggests a higher proportion of pupils are on track to make better than expected progress in these subjects.
- Leaders identified that progress for pupils with special educational needs remained less strong than for their peers because too often the quality of teaching varied as they worked in small groups outside the class or in lessons. An increased focus on improving the learning opportunities and the setting of work that more closely matches their needs has begun to accelerate progress recently. Nevertheless, progress for these pupils in writing and mathematics, whilst average and improving, does not yet match their good progress in reading or the progress of other groups in the school.
- Pupils, including those with disabilities and those with special educational needs, have done particularly well in their reading because the teaching of reading, and phonics especially, has been a priority. Consequently an above average proportion of Year 1 pupils met the expected level this year in the phonics screening test.
- Achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children join the school with skills that are generally below age-related expectations but leave the Reception classes with levels of communication, language and literacy that are broadly in line with the national average. This is because literacy, especially phonics, is particularly well taught, ensuring children have a good start in learning to read and write.
- The extra money provided for those pupils eligible for the pupil premium is used to offer these pupils additional support with their learning. In 2013, only a very small number of Year 6 pupils were supported through the pupil premium. As a result of more rigorous checks on how well they are doing, leaders and teachers have managed to ensure that pupils in receipt of the funding made similar progress to their peers over the last year. Over three quarters of them have made accelerated progress, narrowing the gap with their peers.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because a legacy of weaker teaching has, in the past, led to fewer pupils making the expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result of leaders' actions, teaching has now improved and much of the teaching seen during the inspection was good.
- Inconsistencies remain, especially in the way teachers use their knowledge of what pupils can do to add additional challenge to lessons, particularly for the most able pupils. They do not always plan activities that match the needs of all groups, including those with special educational needs. Pupils' progress is most rapid in those lessons where teachers check regularly how well pupils are doing and promptly adapt activities to increase the challenge or provide support where

needed.

- Good quality teaching has been maintained in the Reception class since the last inspection. Staff use assessment carefully to track the progress that children make and plan activities that address individuals' needs effectively.
- Pupils' work is regularly marked and often provides advice on how to improve. Where marking is best, pupils are able to respond to teachers' comments and use them to improve subsequent pieces of work. However, this is not yet consistent in all classes or in all subjects. As a result, pupils sometimes continue to make the same mistakes.
- The quality of support from other adults from Reception to Year 6 is variable. In some lessons, their contribution is highly effective. For example, in one English lesson, pupils struggling with the concept of synonyms were able to edit their writing to include a greater range of descriptive words. This was because of effective questioning and modelling of writing by adults. Elsewhere, a lack of focused questioning or insufficient guidance from teachers on what pupils are expected to learn during the lesson means pupils do not achieve as well as they might.
- Pupils enjoy lessons, although sometimes their concentration and progress dips at times when the work is too hard or too easy. Positive relationships between staff and pupils keep the pupils focused and generally support their positive attitudes to learning well. Consequently, even when some pupils may find the work easy, they are still motivated to work hard. All parents and carers commented positively on how their children enjoyed school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- The school's positive promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development means pupils get on well together. Pupils enjoy taking responsibility in their classes and the wider school.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They know what constitutes bullying and they are confident that any incidences of it occurring are not the norm, as the school's records show. They are confident that staff at the school will help them should any problems occur.
- Anti-bullying advice and guidance on keeping safe, such as when using computers, help pupils have a good knowledge of how to keep themselves safe from harm.
- Attendance is high. The school has worked hard to build good relationships with families and, as a result, attendance for all groups is similar. The school actively promotes equality of opportunity and does not tolerate discrimination.
- Behaviour in lessons and around school is generally good and pupils are enthusiastic about learning. However, occasionally, when the lesson does not engage pupils sufficiently, they become less attentive. Whilst pupils, parents and carers all say pupils like coming to school and enjoy the range of activities on offer, pupils report they sometimes find some lessons less interesting. They explain that they like lessons best where they are learning new facts and where they are actively engaged and 'hands-on'.

The leadership and management

are good

- The headteacher, governors and other leaders are passionate about their school and the pupils in it. They recognise that progress over time has dipped in recent years and have taken prompt actions to address this. Other staff support leaders in their drive to bring about improvement and make pupils' progress even better, with one commenting, 'We are making progress and becoming successful.'
- Leaders at all levels, including those appointed for the start of this academic year, have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and what needs to be improved. They have successfully focused on improving pupils' outcomes in particular by concentrating on improving the consistency and quality of teaching and additional support. Difficult conversations about teaching performance are not shirked when these are necessary.

- Checks on pupils' progress by leaders have become more rigorous and they are increasingly holding staff to account for the progress pupils make. There is a good focus on promoting equality of opportunity for all groups of pupils by senior staff; however, teachers often rely on leaders too heavily for this analysis of pupils' progress. As a result, although teaching is improving strongly and increased proportions of pupils are making better than expected progress, some inconsistencies remain and not all pupils' progress is good. Consequently the school's development plans reflect leaders' priority to help staff further to secure greater consistency and accountability and to provide more high quality teaching.
- The school has worked well with the local authority. It has received good quality support and a range of expertise and this has had a good impact on improving outcomes for pupils. The local authority agreed the school's priorities and the school's own self-evaluation, matches that of the local authority and this inspection.
- The curriculum is successful at enabling pupils to use literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills across a range of subjects. The school allocates funding to provide a range of enrichment opportunities across the curriculum, including sports. It is currently evaluating several options for additional government sport funding to broaden these further. Pupils agree there are a wide range of activities to be involved in and say they appreciate the variety of sporting opportunities, both in school and with other local schools, explaining that these help them to keep healthy.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body knows the school's strengths and weaknesses well. Members are able to challenge as well as support school leaders and hold them responsible for pupils' achievement. This is because they have sought training from the school and local authority to develop their working knowledge of pupil progress information. They understand how targets are set to improve teaching and what the school is doing to reward good teaching and tackle any underperformance. Governors can explain how the pupil premium budget has been planned to accelerate the progress of eligible pupils and increasingly are asking questions of the school if any pupils fall behind. They make sure that all statutory requirements are met, including those relating to safeguarding.

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

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|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Unique reference number | 118618 |
| Local authority | Kent |
| Inspection number | 426474 |
| 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 | 133 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Colin Jones |
| Headteacher | Jonathan Bassett |
| Date of previous school inspection | 25–26 January 2012 |
| Telephone number | 01622 717337 |
| Fax number | 01622 790740 |
| Email address | headteacher@st-marks-aylesford.kent.sch.uk |

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