

Holmer CofE Academy

Holmer Road, Hereford, HR4 9RX

Inspection dates 18–19 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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.

- Standards are rising in both key stages. In each year group, most pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teachers work hard to make lessons interesting and enjoyable for pupils, who learn well as a result.
- Pupils who need extra help in lessons receive good support from teachers and other adults. Pupils eligible for the pupil premium are making increasingly good progress.
- Pupils behave well and they are keen to learn. They are proud of their school and enjoy taking responsibility. Pupils say, and parents agree, that this is a safe school.
- Attendance is improving and pupils arrive on time to school.
- The curriculum provides a wide range of topics which help pupils develop their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Pupils' strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported by assemblies, lessons, visits and sports.
- The work of the senior leaders, supported by the staff and the governing body, has led to rapid improvements in teaching.
- Governors challenge the school well because they check its work through regular visits. Governors are fully involved in the school's drive for improvement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is good, but not enough is outstanding.
- Teachers do not always make sure that all pupils, particularly the more able, have enough challenge. At times, pupils have too few opportunities to work at their own pace and find things out for themselves.
- Teachers do not involve the adults who are assisting learning sufficiently well, particularly when the whole class is working together.
- Although pupils' work is regularly marked in detail, pupils are not given enough time in the lessons to respond to teachers' advice and extra questions.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 26 lessons, taught by 16 teachers. Six of these lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors listened to pupils read and attended an assembly.
- Inspectors met two groups of pupils and talked to other pupils in lessons, in the playground and as pupils moved around the school.
- Inspectors saw pupils' written work during lessons and looked in greater depth at a selection of their books.
- Inspectors took account of the 46 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). They spoke informally to parents at the start of the school day.
- Meetings were held with the headteachers, other school leaders and staff and five members of the governing body. Inspectors considered the responses to the questionnaires completed by nine members of staff. They met an external consultant who works regularly with the school.
- Inspectors looked closely at a number of documents including the school's checks on how well it is doing and its plans for improvement. They checked the school's information about pupils' progress over time, looked at records about the quality of teaching and minutes of governing body meetings. They scrutinised how the school keeps its pupils safe and looked at records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Elizabeth Cooper, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kathryn Brunt

Additional Inspector

Michael Appleby

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Holmer Church of England Academy is larger than the average primary school. The school has increased in size since the last inspection and now has two classes in each year group.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium (the additional government funding for looked after children and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals) is below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is just above the national average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below the national average.
- Most pupils come from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average. A few pupils join at times other than the usual starting-point.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Since the last inspection, there have been a number of changes in teachers, with several leaving during the past 18 months.
- The school is led jointly by two headteachers, one of whom was the deputy headteacher until September 2013.
- The school is a member of an informal partnership with 24 other schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by
 - giving pupils enough opportunities to work independently, so that they can explore the learning activities in depth and at the right level of difficulty, particularly the more able
 - making sure that other adults who support learning in the classroom are actively involved in helping all groups of pupils, so that pupils who regularly receive help become confident to work on their own when appropriate
 - giving pupils more time to follow up the guidance provided by teachers in their books, so that they can further improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children enter Reception with levels of knowledge and understanding which are typical for their age. However, some children's skills in speaking, reading and using numbers are below this. Children make good progress during the Reception Year and are well prepared to start Year 1 with standards that are often above those expected for their age.
- As they move through Key Stages 1 and 2, most pupils continue to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and there is little difference between the progress of boys and girls in each year. However, some more able pupils do not make as much progress as their classmates because teachers do not always give them hard enough work. Pupils who join at times other than the usual starting-point often make rapid progress because the school finds out about any gaps in their learning and gives them good support.
- At Key Stage 2, there was a marked dip in pupils' achievement in reading and mathematics in 2012. There has been a strong recovery in 2013, particularly in reading and writing. A handful of pupils did not do as well as expected in the mathematics tests, and a small number of more able pupils made better progress in reading and mathematics than in writing. Despite these differences in achievement, most of the pupils in the year group made good progress.
- The school's information about how well pupils are doing shows that current Year 6 pupils are on course to achieve much higher standards in the national tests than last year's group, including more able pupils.
- The school has made effective changes to how pupils are taught to link letters and sounds following the slightly below average 2012 national phonics (the sounds that letters make) screening check results in Year 1. The proportion of pupils who reached the required standard in the check was well above average in 2013, and all pupils, previously in Year 1, who took the check again in Year 2 passed.
- Reading is well taught and pupils develop an enjoyment of reading and love of books. They use a range of skills to work out new words; as a Year 3 pupil explained, 'I sound it out in my head'. Younger readers know how to use pictures in the stories to work out meanings of new words.
- The attainment of pupils eligible for the pupil premium was over two years behind that of other pupils in English and 18 months behind in mathematics in 2012. The school used funding last year to boost pupils' reading skills, to give extra support in English and mathematics lessons and to help pay for school trips. In 2013, the gap between pupils eligible for the pupil premium and other pupils was halved in reading and writing, and several pupils made good progress in mathematics. In other year groups, the gaps are closing rapidly because teachers check whether the help pupils receive is making a difference to their progress.
- The progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is usually good because they receive good teaching and support. This reflects the school's commitment to making sure that everyone has the same chance to succeed. Pupils work hard and are keen to do well, have positive attitudes to learning and as a result, they make good progress.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Pupils' books from the last academic year and from the start of the autumn term confirm that effective teaching is enabling good progress and achievement in English and mathematics. Parents who completed the Parent View survey agree that their children are well taught and make good progress.
- In all lessons observed during the inspection, teachers explained what pupils were expected to learn at the start of the lesson. Pupils often make good or better progress because teachers give them interesting work which is set at exactly the right level of difficulty and stimulates their thirst for learning.
- In a Year 6 lesson where pupils were writing a story opening set during the Blitz, pupils had listened to the sounds of the attack and had prepared a detailed mind-map of all the words they could use to set the scene. This led to imaginative writing by a pupil aiming for a high target who wrote that the 'planes are dancing over my head, terrorising the eerie ebony sky'.
- In the best lessons, teachers ask questions that make pupils think and explain, and this means that teachers can find out how much pupils already know, put right any errors and set harder tasks. As a result, pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, make accelerated progress because they understand what they must learn.
- Pupils enjoy working together in their lessons and helping each other. In a Year 3 mathematics lesson, a pupil encouraged a classmate who had got the wrong answer, by saying, 'at least you had a go'. However, at times, pupils do not have enough opportunities to work independently, and as a result, they do not always learn at the best pace. More able pupils sometimes do not work at the right level of difficulty and this hampers their progress.
- Teachers and other adults work well as a team to make sure that pupils, including those with disabilities or special educational needs, learn as much as possible. Sometimes teachers do not make the most of additional adult support to assist the learning of other groups of pupils or to promote the independent learning of pupils they work with most often.
- Teaching and learning are good in the Early Years Foundation Stage. There is good use of assessment to track the children's learning and development. For example, in a physical education lesson in the Reception class, children were working out their own ideas for different ways of running, and an extra adult encouraged them to vary their movements, while making notes on how well each child was doing.
- The quality of writing in pupils' books is good, and pupils have the opportunity to write at length in English and in other subjects. Teachers mark pupils' work thoroughly, giving guidance to help them improve their work. However, many of the books seen showed that pupils did not have enough opportunity to follow up the advice and extra activities suggested by teachers. This meant that pupils' next piece of work did not always show that they had improved on their previous learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The vast majority of pupils are well behaved in lessons and around the school. Most pupils' attitudes to learning are good, although occasionally a few pupils become restless where they have to listen for long periods and are less actively involved in their learning.

- All parents who responded to online survey or spoke with inspectors agree that their children are safe and well looked after in school, and that behaviour is good. The staff questionnaires show that the parents' views are shared by staff, and a member of the lunchtime staff commented positively on the 'nice manners and good behaviour of the pupils'.
- Pupils understand about the different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and report that bullying is rare. They feel confident to talk to staff 'as soon as you can' because they know that any concerns will be sorted out quickly.
- Pupils show respect towards each other, with older pupils holding doors open for the younger pupils when they enter the hall for assembly. Pupils gain confidence by helping the school to run smoothly, such as looking after one another in the playground and running the school tuck-shop, where they are encouraged to make a small profit. As a Year 6 pupil explained, 'responsibilities and trust will help us for next year'.
- Attendance has improved since the previous inspection and is now just above average. The school has worked well with parents to reduce term-time holidays and to improve punctuality. Pupils and classes are rewarded for high attendance, with letters sent home to parents when this happens.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteachers, other leaders in the school and the governors know the school well. They have successfully tackled all the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. The school is working on a sensible number of priorities to improve teaching and raise achievement, and is in a good position to move forward.
- The headteachers have an accurate view of teaching because they visit lessons frequently and go through pupils' books regularly to check the quality of work. In their meetings with class teachers, they discuss pupils' progress and ask how well different groups of pupils are doing. Senior leaders encourage teachers in each year to plan lessons together and share ideas.
- Senior leaders do not hesitate to deal with weaker teaching, and as a result, pupils make good progress. An experienced consultant has helped leaders become skilled at using all the available information to decide how well pupils are doing. Teachers in charge of areas of the school's work have coached staff, leading to improvements in teaching.
- In the school plan there is a strong emphasis on making sure all pupils make rapid progress. Teachers' targets for improvement and training link closely to the plan, and teachers do not receive extra pay or responsibilities unless their teaching is good or better.
- Staff who completed the questionnaire or spoke to inspectors were positive about the quality of training they receive, including opportunities to visit other schools in the partnership. The headteachers have involved subject leaders in writing the school's action plan, giving them a good grasp of the priorities of the school as a whole. Teachers in other schools in the local authority have benefited from the training given by the school's information and communication technology coordinator.
- Pupils learn the different subjects of the curriculum through interesting and varied topics, with plenty of opportunities for them to write at length about what they have learnt and to use their mathematical skills. The school sets a high priority on all pupils keeping fit and healthy, with displays around the school celebrating the many sports on offer and recent successes of the

school's teams.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a particular strength of the school. In an outstanding assembly, pupils from Reception to Year 6 were all fully involved in a sign language activity and in discussions which helped them reflect about the school's value of the month. Through the links with a school in Tanzania, as well as the Multi-faiths Day, pupils learn about different cultures. In a Year 2 music lesson, the teacher's African drumming and the whole-class practice with clave sticks enthused groups of pupils to create their own rhythms.
- Parents are pleased that the headteachers are always at the school gate at the start of the day to welcome pupils and to listen to parents. They appreciate the parents' workshops, such as the meeting about how to help Reception children learn the letters and sounds (phonics). As a result of the school's work with parents, pupils' attendance and punctuality have improved significantly since the last inspection.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Since the last inspection, governors have made the most of training from school leaders and from the external consultant, especially in understanding their role in challenging as well as supporting the school. Governors now dig beneath the headlines of the school's data to check how much progress pupils are making in each year group. They ask searching questions about all aspects of the school and hold school leaders fully to account.
 - Governors make frequent visits to find out about the school at first-hand, going into lessons, looking at pupils' books and talking to pupils about their learning. As one governor explained, 'we try to identify improvements made by the school when we visit the lessons'.
 - Governors have supported senior leaders in tackling weaker teaching. They check that all teachers and leaders have challenging targets which are linked to pupils' progress and the school's action plan. They make sure that teachers are only rewarded where their teaching is at least good.
 - Governors check the budget regularly. They know that the pupil premium funding is being spent well now because eligible pupils are making better progress. They make sure that these pupils have opportunities to take part in school journeys and extra activities. Governors have recently invested in better sports equipment and specialist coaches and are planning to use the new sport premium to offer an even wider range of clubs and sports events.
 - Governors make sure that safeguarding meets statutory requirements by checking arrangements regularly.

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	137731
Local authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	427030

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non maintained
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	354
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Bramble
Headteacher	Judith Cecil; Jayne Maund
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01432 273301
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