

Welwyn St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

15 London Road, Welwyn, AL6 9DJ

Inspection dates 24–25 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Governors, staff, parents and pupils, working together generated the school's clear vision of 'Learning Together for Life', which reflects the community's passion for learning.
- The school is extremely well led and managed. The headteacher is an excellent role model and governors are very knowledgeable about the performance of the school. There is a relentless drive for continual improvement.
- Teaching is consistently good and much is outstanding. Teachers are very enthusiastic and plan lessons that challenge and engage pupils well so they are eager to learn. They assess pupils' work accurately and regularly.
- Senior school leaders work tirelessly to maintain the high quality of teaching by rigorously monitoring pupils' achievement, teachers' performance, and designing a very effective programme of professional development, well matched to teachers' needs.
- Pupils throughout the school make rapid progress in their learning. They achieve standards in English and mathematics that are well above those seen nationally and quickly develop into fluent readers.
- The school is a happy, harmonious and orderly community within in a safe and secure environment. Pupils know they are well looked after and feel valued. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted extremely well.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They like their teachers and find their lessons fun and interesting. Their attitudes to learning are exemplary and their attendance is above average. Pupils behave extremely well in lessons and around the school.
- The school provides a well-balanced range of subjects and a full programme of trips, clubs and 'expert' visitors who share their knowledge and skills with pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 22 lessons or parts of lessons, including three joint observations with the headteacher, and looked at pupils' written work in their books and on display.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, the headteacher, other school leaders and with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke to two groups of pupils as well as with other pupils in lessons and around the school. An inspector listened to some pupils reading.
- A number of the school's documents were examined, including on pupils' progress and the support given to pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs, those in receipt of the pupil premium, the school's own evaluation of its performance and its improvement plan and records relating to behaviour, safeguarding and attendance.
- Inspectors took account of 65 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), together with the views expressed by parents as they arrived at school to pick up their children and by one parent by telephone. Additionally, they analysed 32 questionnaires returned by staff.

Inspection team

James McVeigh, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Lewis

Additional Inspector

Shela Rowan

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Welwyn St Marys church of England voluntary aided Primary School is larger than the average primary school and there are two classes in each year group.
- The large majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and the remainder are from a wide range of other ethnic backgrounds. There are few pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (extra government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children in local authority care and other specific groups) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average and the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is similar to the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate pupils' progress further in mathematics by giving them greater responsibility for their own learning by providing specific guidance on how to achieve the next level.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Children join the Reception with the knowledge skills and abilities expected for their age. They make at least good progress in all areas of learning and quickly develop confident social skills. Children make rapid progress in their early reading skills, for example, quickly increasing the number of common words they recognise on sight.
- Teachers make learning fun and children eagerly join in role play games. For example, after reading about 'A Bear Hunt', children carefully searched for bears outside; an activity cleverly linked to ordering numbers.
- Pupils continue to make rapid progress in Key Stage 1 and attain above average standards in English and mathematics, particularly in reading.
- By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils reach standards in English and mathematics that are well above the national average. They make rapid progress in all years: the proportions making or exceeding expected progress are higher than national figures in both English and mathematics.
- Building on the positive start in their early years, pupils quickly become competent readers. They develop good strategies to tackle unfamiliar words and read with expression and confidence. Pupils make accelerated progress in phonics (the sounds that letters make) because their teachers have excellent subject knowledge and enunciate the sounds very clearly. Pupils in Year 1 performed well above average in the last two national phonics screening checks. Parents are encouraged and supported very well by the school to listen to their children read. As a result pupils enjoy reading and do so regularly.
- Strategies and interventions to support pupils with individual learning needs are very effective. The small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language make outstanding progress. Teaching assistants support pupils well in lessons and in face-to-face activities so that they learn successfully.
- Support for pupils eligible for the pupil premium is very effective. Information from 2012 shows that in English and mathematics, this group was over a year behind other pupils in their attainment. A year later they were about two terms behind in both subjects. Current information demonstrates they are making accelerated progress and the gap in attainment between them and their peers in school is closing rapidly.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are identified early and receive well-targeted extra help. Regular and rigorous monitoring ensures they all make at least good progress.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching is consistently good and much is outstanding. Teachers know their pupils' attainment and abilities well. They plan consistently well so that pupils are challenged appropriately and fully engaged in lessons. They have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and productivity and pupils respond very well to their teaching.
- Teachers teach with enthusiasm and have established excellent relationships with their classes. Pupils like their teachers and are eager to learn. They think their lessons are fun and interesting,

and teachers or teaching assistants readily help if anyone gets stuck.

- Teachers mark pupils' written work regularly and accurately. They point out and praise what the pupils have done well and give advice on how to improve their work. There are opportunities for pupils to respond straight away to the marking. Pupils know they are doing well, but sometimes they are not given enough responsibility for their own learning in mathematics including specific information about how to reach the next level.
- In lessons teacher use skilful questioning to assess pupils understanding and reshape the lesson appropriately in response. Pupils often have challenging questions for their teacher, further demonstrating their engagement and thirst for knowledge.
- Teachers make very effective use of 'partner talk' for pairs of pupils to share their ideas briefly and improve their understanding. Additionally, teachers model what they expect pupils to be able to do by the end of a lesson and share the success criteria so that they can assess their own work and that of their peers.
- The well led and managed Reception has a large and well-resourced outside area which supports learning in all areas very well. Activities, both inside and outside, are very well planned to match children's learning needs and stimulate their imagination and curiosity so they persevere and consolidate their developing skills well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils' outstanding behaviour contributes extremely well to the school's calm, orderly and welcoming atmosphere. Pupils are very polite and courteous and move sensibly and safely around the school. They are very clear about the behaviour code and are eager to uphold it at all times.
- The playgrounds are well monitored and well equipped with climbing equipment, rackets and balls. Children get on very well with each other. Year 6 pupils, acting as 'Yellow-banders', take their roles in ensuring younger children are playing happily, very seriously. Trained Year 6 pupils, known as 'Fix-it friends' are on hand to help sort out any minor squabbles.
- Pupils are proud to take on extra responsibilities, such as school council representative and membership of the 'green group' who are concerned about recycling and saving energy.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and, combined with the school's strenuous efforts to encourage regular attendance, their attendance continues to be above average.
- Pupils have exemplary attitudes to learning. They listen carefully to their teachers and other adults. They are happy to work hard and present their work well. They know that good behaviour will help them to continue making rapid progress.
- The overwhelming consensus by governors, parents and staff is that pupils' behaviour is outstanding. School records show that there are very few incidents of misbehaviour. The school works hard to keep pupils with behavioural problems in school. A very few exclusions have been used over the past few years, together with well-planned support from teachers and outside specialists, to successfully guide such pupils to acceptable ways of behaving.
- Pupils understand bullying and know it exists in a variety of forms. They think bullying at school

is rare and are confident that teachers tackle it quickly.

- Pupils know how to stay healthy and safe. For example, they have learned about road safety, 'stranger danger' and when using the internet through visits from the local police and helping police use radar guns to measure car speeds.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- A great example of governors, staff, parents and pupils working together is the creation of a clear vision statement for the school and the corporate tag line 'Learning Together for Life', that accurately reflects their passion for learning.
- The school is extremely well led and managed. The headteacher is an excellent role model and governors are very knowledgeable about the performance of the school. There is a relentless drive for continual improvement.
- The headteacher knows her school very well. She provides inspiring leadership in an understated and very professional manner that has created a strong sense of team spirit within the school. Staff know what is expected of them and live up to those expectations. A focused school improvement plan has been produced with the support of governors that underpins the school's high-level effectiveness.
- Other leaders are given very good opportunities to develop their leadership skills by taking on important leadership roles, working with other schools and through external professional development. Subject leaders play an active part in the management of the school and are held to account for the standards pupils achieve in their subjects.
- Senior school leaders are relentless in the drive to maintain the high quality of teaching. Teachers' performance is checked regularly through rigorous monitoring of teachers' planning, the quality of their teaching and the progress each pupil makes.
- The school uses the local authority well to provide an objective view of its performance and provide further training for governors, teachers and teaching assistants. Teachers are pleased with the opportunities they have for professional development and for the in-school support and training they receive. Newly qualified teachers speak highly of the effective induction support and guidance they get from their in-school mentors.
- The school engages well with parents. Parents receive regular, high quality information about how they can help their children at home and the progress their children are making. The parent council is working very well to share parents' views with governors and senior leaders. For example, the council identified what parents found daunting about starting school and so staff made alterations to the transition arrangements into Reception to make the experience smoother.
- The school's vision 'Learning Together for Life' is reflected in the range and organisation of the subjects it offers. Pupils have very good opportunities to link learning from several areas. For example, an outstanding science lesson on seed dispersal was linked to art, the school's excellent nature reserve and to developing reading and writing skills.
- Music, art and sport are very well promoted through a well-equipped music room, excellent sports partnership with other schools and a rich display of pupils' artwork. Extra funding for

physical education is used to engage well qualified sports specialists for sports clubs. Further enrichment comes from a wide range of well-attended clubs, such as for foreign languages, and visiting 'experts', such as authors.

- Within a strong Christian ethos, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are promoted extremely well; for example, through very well planned assemblies ('one of the joys of the school' said one pupil) and visits to different places of worship and art galleries. The school ensures equality of opportunity for all and effectively discourages all forms of discrimination.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Although senior school leaders inform the governing body regularly about the school's performance, governors see for themselves how well the school is doing through regular focused visits. They have undertaken training to understand school information and have a clear view of the school's strengths based on a good knowledge of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. They ask challenging questions of the school but have great confidence in the headteacher and the improvements she is driving.
- Governors set robust targets for the performance of the headteacher and ensure good decisions are made in allocating the school's finances and rewarding teachers appropriately for their work. They are fully aware of how the pupil premium is spent and its impact, and have an excellent understanding of the schools' strengths and areas for development. All statutory arrangements for safeguarding are securely in place.

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	117490
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	425379

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	424
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	William Morris
Headteacher	Mary Westley
Date of previous school inspection	20 November 2008
Telephone number	01438 714169
Fax number	01438 716472
Email address	head@welwynst-marys.herts.sch.uk

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