

St Helen's Church of England Primary School

Church Street, Cliffe, Rochester, ME3 7PU

Inspection dates 23–24 October 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		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Achievement over time is not yet good because pupils' progress in reading and mathematics does not match that in writing by the end of Key Stage 2 despite some recent rapid improvements.
- The pace of pupils' learning is sometimes too slow because they are not always moved on quickly enough into more challenging work. Pupils do not always understand how to move to the next level in their learning.
- Planning does not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in solving problems.
- Pupils do not make enough progress in reading because activities do not always require them to use a range of skills in their work.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their learning in the outdoor setting.
- Initiatives put in place to support pupils who need extra help in their learning have yet to be fully assessed for their impact.
- Checks on the progress of pupils are not regular enough to ensure those at risk of underachievement are always supported effectively.
- Leaders do not fully assess the impact of their actions in improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement across the school.
- Governors have yet to use the information they receive on the school's performance to drive forward improvements in pupils' achievement at a faster pace.

The school has the following strengths

- Behaviour is good and pupils say they feel safe in school. Pupils value the opportunity to support each other in their learning.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge effectively so that pupils confidently use specialist vocabulary when talking about their learning.
- Pupils across the school are now making accelerated progress and unvalidated Key Stages 1 and 2 test results in 2013 show an improving picture.
- Pupils supported through the pupil premium make good progress in both English and mathematics and gaps are closing quickly.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 17 lessons, listened to pupils read and looked at pupils' work in their exercise books.
- Inspectors met with pupils and talked with them about their work. Meetings were also held with subject leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority.
- Documentation covering safeguarding, the measurement of performance of staff, records of behaviour and safety, attendance, and on pupils' attainment and progress were reviewed.
- Inspectors took account of 16 responses from parents and carers to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 15 questionnaires from staff. An inspector also talked with parents and carers informally during the inspection.

Inspection team

Howard Jones, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Barbara Saltmarsh

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average-sized primary school.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, there is one Reception class.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils receiving support from the pupil premium funding, which is extra government support for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after children and those from service families, is average. In this school, it relates to pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those supported at school action, school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The Chair of Governors was appointed in January 2013 and a number of governors joined in the summer term.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching to further raise pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring children in Reception have increased opportunities to develop their learning within the outdoor setting
 - ensuring teachers check pupils' progress more frequently in order to increase the pace of learning towards more challenging work
 - planning activities which engage all pupils in clearly defined tasks which develop their reading skills
 - providing a range of opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills to solve real-life problems
 - developing the target-setting process so that pupils understand how to move to the next level in their learning.
- Improve the impact of leaders, managers and governors by:
 - rigorously monitoring the impact of additional approaches used to support disabled pupils and those with special educational needs
 - ensuring more frequent checks are made on pupils' progress to effectively support those pupils at risk of underachievement
 - developing the roles of leaders to enable them to judge more effectively the impact of their actions on improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement
 - strengthening the role of governors by developing their skills to check how well the school is doing.

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

- Pupils' achievement has been too variable as they move through the school. Progress in reading and mathematics does not match that seen in writing by the end of Key Stage 2. In Year 6, a good number of pupils achieve the higher levels in writing, whereas attainment in reading and mathematics has been below the national average.
- Progress made by pupils in Key Stage 1 is uneven. Attainment at the end of Year 2 in reading and writing has not been as strong as previously, although a large proportion of pupils achieved the higher levels in mathematics.
- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills mostly in line with those expected for their age. The large proportion of children reach the levels expected by the end of the Reception year so that their progress overall is no more than typical for their age.
- Pupils scored broadly the national average in the most recent Year 1 phonics screening check (linking letters and sounds). Older pupils are provided with regular opportunities to read and are partnered to support younger children; however, other activities are not always clearly defined in ways to develop pupils' reading skills to ensure the best possible progress.
- More able pupils make mostly the progress that is expected of them. However, in the national tests in Year 6, a good proportion achieved the higher levels in mathematics.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make progress similar to their peers, and sometimes even better progress. Interventions and tailored support by other adults within the classroom are effective in developing pupils' confidence in learning, although strategies put in place to support these pupils have yet to be fully assessed for their impact.
- The gap in attainment of pupils supported through the pupil premium has narrowed markedly. In 2012, they were ahead of their peers by 12 months in English and by six months in mathematics. School evidence indicates this is being sustained. This is because of the effective personalised support which includes counselling.
- Pupils across all year groups are now making rapid gains in their learning. Consequently, progress has been accelerated so that unvalidated test results for 2013 show that attainment is now at the national levels expected for all pupils by the end of Year 6 in both English and mathematics. Achievement at the end of Year 2 is also now strong.
- Pupils are increasing their proficiency within a range of sporting activities. For example, netball and running serve to ensure pupils become adept in using the appropriate skills to become successful. An after-school circuit-training 'Fit club' is very popular with pupils too.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- There are variations in the quality of teaching which lead to inconsistent progress for pupils as they move through the school. Consequently, the achievement of pupils over time is not good enough especially in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils are not always aware of how to reach higher standards in their work. Pupils do have opportunities to check one another's activities to see how successful they have been; however, they do not understand how to use this to move to the next level in their learning because they are less secure how their personal targets link to their tasks.
- The pace of learning is sometimes too slow. Teachers are skilled at asking questions which serve to develop pupils' knowledge; nonetheless, this is not always extended to regularly checking the understanding of pupils across the range of abilities. Consequently, they are not moved quickly enough into work which is more challenging so they can make the best possible progress.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply their mathematical skills to solve real-life problems. Teachers plan a range of tasks and use resources well to support pupils' learning and to sustain their engagement, although these do not sufficiently require pupils to use their

understanding within more complex and demanding scenarios.

- Within Reception, children's learning experience is sometimes limited. Adults are very effective in using resources to develop children's basic literacy, number and creative skills; for example, as seen in one session using information and communication technology (ICT). However, children do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their learning within the outdoor setting.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make progress sometimes even better than their peers. Other adults within the classroom are skilled at supporting them to become more independent in their learning, for example in developing their reading, but there are few school-wide checks on how they are doing in all aspects of their learning.
- Learning is effective where pupils use subject vocabulary to review their learning. For example, as seen in two science lessons in Years 1 and 2 in which pupils had to demonstrate their understanding using key subject ideas. The extended dialogue this generated ensured the level of challenge was sustained throughout and progress was strong for all pupils.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Children within Reception have made a good start to school. They enjoy listening to stories and move quickly into planned activities or tasks which require them to develop their ideas through independent play. Even when challenged to use their understanding they remain persistent and want to listen when adults talk about how successful they have been.
- Pupils value the responsibilities they have. They especially appreciate the opportunities to support younger children with their reading and mathematical work. Pupils in Year 6 act as 'young leaders' and mentor pupils in Key Stage 1. The school council has also been very involved in promoting healthy eating. The atmosphere around the school and in the canteen at lunchtimes is calm.
- The school's Christian values are evident throughout the school. Pupils have regular opportunities to reflect on the more profound aspects of life and clearly enjoy coming together as a whole school to sing and celebrate their achievements.
- Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes in their learning and are happy to talk about their work. They collaborate well in small group activities and listen carefully both to their teachers and to one another. Behaviour overall is not outstanding because the pace of learning does not always support even stronger progress being made across all subjects.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school and know their teachers will act if they have any concerns. Racist incidents and bullying are rare and the school takes effective action when required. Pupils are tolerant of the differences of others. They can explain how to keep themselves safe using the internet and say that cyber-bullying is not an issue for them.
- Attendance is above average and punctuality is good.
- The parents and carers who responded to Parent View (the online questionnaire) say their children are happy at school and feel safe when they are there because the school ensures they are well looked after.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher has initiated strategies that have brought about improvements across the school. She has taken appropriate action to deal with weak teaching. However, there is not enough evidence that this has had sufficient impact in raising pupils' achievement over time, notwithstanding some recent rapid improvements in pupils' progress.
- Leaders have introduced a range of additional resources to improve pupil outcomes. These are improving the progress pupils should be making within year groups. However, leaders do not fully assess the impact of their actions to ensure consistently high expectations are typical of all teaching.
- Checks are made on pupils' progress and evidence of their work is referenced to support this.

However, these checks are not sufficiently frequent to ensure appropriate action is taken soon enough to support pupils who are at risk of underachievement.

- The school does not tolerate discrimination. Equality of opportunity is taken seriously so that all pupils, including those with additional learning needs, are provided for. Nonetheless, provision for these pupils has yet to be more fully evaluated. The school has identified this as a priority for improvement.
- The headteacher has an accurate view of the quality of teaching. There is a rigorous approach to checking the standard of teaching, which is appropriately linked to targets and tailored training. This has led to improved classroom practice and gains in pupils' learning across subjects and demonstrates the school has the capacity to improve.
- The local authority has provided appropriate advice and support to the school. This has been timely and used well by leaders to supplement their own action planning.
- The subjects taught are appropriately planned to cover the full range of knowledge and skills to prepare pupils for the next stage in their education. Topic work is a key feature and is used effectively to provide opportunities for pupils to use their writing skills across other subjects. A variety of resources are used which effectively engage pupils' interests.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural opportunities provided for pupils reflect the school's Christian values. Pupils reflect on aspects of family life and stories from other cultures. They have expressed their ideas through art, using the style of Kandinsky, and in writing by adopting the styles of famous authors. Pupils take full advantage of sports activities provided through the Primary Sports funding.
- Safeguarding arrangements comply with statutory requirements. Risk assessments are in place.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors play an active part in the school. They make themselves available during parent consultation events and observe teaching first hand across the school. However, they have yet to fully appropriate the information they have gathered to rigorously compare the school's performance with others nationally. Although governors have begun to challenge school leaders this has not been sufficiently strong to drive forward improvements in pupils' achievement quickly enough. They have still to develop their skills through additional training to effectively track teachers' pay progression against pupils' progress and more fully check the headteacher's performance. Governors do have an effective understanding of how the pupil premium funding is being spent. They have assessed its impact on closing gaps in these pupils' understanding and have evaluated how this support for these pupils needs to be further enhanced. They have checked how the Primary Sports funding has been allocated to ensure it extends the competence of teachers in providing physical education. The school finances are secure.

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	118641
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	426478

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	185
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Darren Atkinson
Headteacher	Vivienne Barr
Date of previous school inspection	1–2 February 2012
Telephone number	01634 220246
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