

# Maidstone, St Michael's Church of England Junior School

Douglas Road, Maidstone, Kent, ME16 8ER

**Inspection dates** 11–12 December 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
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.

- Pupils, regardless of their starting points, make good progress across the school. Teachers have a good understanding of individuals' levels and plan work that challenges pupils to achieve well. Relationships between staff and pupils are very strong, supporting pupils' positive attitudes to learning well.
- Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to the good learning taking place especially when pupils with special educational needs and increasingly those who are more able are taught in small groups outside the classroom. They work in very close partnership with teachers and bring an additional range of helpful skills and experiences into the classrooms.
- The school provides very good support for those pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They feel safe because they know that adults care for them. They get on well together and show courtesy and respect towards each other and adults. They enjoy a well-planned curriculum that provides plenty of opportunities to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Thorough and effective checks on teaching and learning and their impact upon pupils' achievement identify strengths and areas for improvement. This information is used well in the good quality school improvement plan.
- The very strong leadership of the executive headteacher, supported well by the heads of school and the effective governing body, is responsible for continuing the significant improvements that were seen in the last inspection.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- While new to their jobs and already knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses, actions taken by middle leaders are too recent to have secured increasing numbers of pupils making better than expected progress.
- Marking does not always show pupils the next steps in their learning clearly enough or match the very good quality guidance seen in pupils' books in some classes.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 16 lessons including small-group sessions for those at risk of falling behind and for the most able. They observed teaching in all the classes and looked at work in pupils' books. They were accompanied either by the executive headteacher or one of the two heads of school for all of the classroom observations.
- They listened to pupils in Years 3 read individually as well as observing a number of guided reading sessions and one teaching pupils about the sounds letters make (phonics). They chatted to pupils informally throughout the inspection. Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons and at various times around the school.
- The inspectors took account of the 14 responses to the Ofsted online Parent View survey as well as reviewing the school's own most recent parental survey and talked to parents and carers informally during the inspection. In addition, they spoke with school leaders, staff, two governors and with a representative of the local authority. The views of 16 staff who completed the staff questionnaire were also taken into account.
- The school's work was observed and the inspectors looked at documentation such as policies, including those relating to safeguarding, behaviour and the school's improvement planning, as well as information on pupils' progress and attendance figures. They also looked at the school's website.

## Inspection team

Jacqueline Marshall, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Michael Elson

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- In this smaller than average sized junior school the large majority of pupils are White British with other pupils from a wide range of minority ethnic heritages. A greater than average proportion of the children speak English as an additional language. Most are at the early stages of learning English when they join the school.
- The proportion of pupils receiving the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is extra funding 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 below average. The proportion being supported through school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The number of pupils joining or leaving the school other than at the usual times is higher than in most other schools.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school is part of the St Michael's Church Schools Federation with St Michael's Church of England Infant School. There is one governing body for the federation. The executive headteacher is also executive headteacher at Archbishop Courtney Primary School.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate progress and raise achievement to increase the proportions of pupils making good or better progress, by:
  - making sure all teachers' marking always gives pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work and time to respond, consistently reflecting the best quality seen elsewhere in the school
  - developing the roles of new leaders so they can more effectively support staff and secure pupils' rapid progress.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. They work hard in lessons and, where teaching is best, challenge themselves to do even more or try the next level of work because teachers have created an atmosphere where pupils want to learn and do well. Scrutiny of pupils' work and the most recent assessment information shows that all groups of pupils make consistently good progress across the school.
- This atmosphere of high expectations has been instrumental in eradicating the legacy of underachievement still present at the last inspection and has secured pupils' good achievement in all classes over the last two years. The school's leaders have concentrated on ensuring that pupils reach the expected levels of attainment for their age. Consequently, progress has been particularly rapid for those pupils who needed to catch up and the gaps between those pupils eligible for pupil premium and their peers have closed totally in reading and mathematics and they are just one term behind in writing.
- School leaders' actions have secured an overall improving picture in the standards pupils reach by the time they leave in Year 6 though they remain broadly average. They identified that in the past fewer pupils reached the higher levels, which limited pupils' overall attainment. In order to raise achievement, expectations for the most able pupils have been raised. Additional support groups providing high levels of challenge have started and work in lessons is even more closely matched to these pupils' needs. Currently an increasing number are working at the higher levels and are on track to achieve Levels 5 and 6 in national tests.
- The school ensures equality of opportunity for all groups of pupils so there is no discrimination. All groups of pupils make good and sometimes better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The school is focused on increasing the proportions of pupils making better than expected progress which have been below those seen nationally in the previous years. For example, a slight dip in the progress a small number of pupils made in reading over time is being successfully tackled with a whole-school focus on increasing pupils' enjoyment of reading. Group reading sessions are now particularly successfully encouraging pupils to read widely and use skills such as inference to deepen their understanding of what they read.
- Effective systems for checking pupils' progress ensure that all pupils including those who have joined the school throughout the year make good progress. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs achieve as well and often better than their peers in reading, writing and mathematics because, along with those at the early stages of learning English, the work that is planned for them, whether in small groups, individually or in lessons, is very closely tailored to their needs. Where their progress is best, for example in a small group being taught by a higher-level teaching assistant in Year 6, pupils are encouraged to use the skills they have learnt in previous lessons independently and are consistently reminded about their targets and challenged to do their best.
- Pupils are developing healthy lifestyles and physical fitness through the school's physical education programme and the additional range of sporting activities on offer. For example, pupils enjoy improving and practising their skills in sessions by a visiting coach.

### The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching in both English and mathematics is typically good. Teachers and additional adults use imaginative methods that capture pupils' interest and so pupils enjoy their lessons and behave well.
- Pupils are fully involved in what they need to do to improve and pay careful attention to comments teachers make when discussing their work during lessons. In some classes pupils increasingly evaluate their work to check whether they have met success criteria and teachers' comments are very effective in showing pupils how to reach the next level. While this is

increasingly evident in all teachers' marking not all matches the high quality seen in some classes where progress is most rapid. Similarly, opportunities to accelerate pupils' progress are sometimes missed because pupils do not always respond to these comments by correcting and improving their own work.

- A strong feature of teaching seen during the inspection was the way in which teachers observed pupils and adjusted their lessons accordingly. This enabled those who struggled to receive additional support, while those who understood could be moved on more quickly. Lessons build securely on previous learning so pupils develop their skills step-by-step. This also ensures that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs progress at rates similar to other pupils.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are very good at using questioning effectively to explore the knowledge and understanding of pupils. Discussions during lessons help to overcome misconceptions and, where progress is most rapid, add additional challenge where needed as pupils demonstrate their understanding. The quality of discussion in the classroom is often high and this provides pupils with opportunities to share their ideas and to talk about their work.
- Occasionally, opportunities for pupils to make even better progress are missed when teachers talk to the whole class without taking enough account of the different abilities of pupils or setting high expectations quickly enough.
- Teaching assistants, some highly skilled, have a very good impact on the progress pupils are making. They understand what needs to be done because planning is shared and expectations are made clear. They support pupils of all abilities and are confident in their approach. Very focused small-group sessions and specific programmes are effective in helping pupils to catch up, access learning when they are new to learning English or build confidence and good attitudes towards learning.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their attendance, which is above average. Pupils behave well in all lessons because they want to learn. They are kind and considerate and show respect towards each other and adults and this helps to foster good relationships in school. They all get on very well together but, should a disagreement arise, know there is always an adult on hand to help to sort it out.
- Just occasionally, pupils become less engaged when the work is not pitched at their level right away or they are not moved onto more challenging tasks quickly enough.
- Pupils understand different forms of bullying, including that related to race, gender and the internet but they are adamant that it does not occur. Pupils have a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe from dangers outside school. They feel safe and secure, knowing that adults care for them. Pupils are equally valued and say that discrimination on any grounds is not tolerated. Those who join the school part-way through the year are helped to settle in quickly because the school has well-established and thoughtful induction arrangements in place.
- The vast majority of parents, carers and staff who responded to the surveys or spoke to inspectors strongly agree that pupils' behaviour is typically good and that children are safe and happy in school. They all agreed that behaviour had improved considerably over the last three years since the current leadership team had been in post.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- The executive headteacher is highly regarded by the local authority, staff, parents and carers and is supported effectively by governors. Very effectively supported by the two heads of school, she has successfully built on the findings of the last inspection, raising achievement and creating a school where all work together with a clear vision and commitment to continuous improvement.
- The school reviews all aspects of its work thoroughly and leaders understand the school's

strengths and what needs to be improved. They act quickly to address any gaps. For example, following a dip in achievement in reading last year the highly successful 'Power of Reading' initiative was introduced. The quality of teaching of reading has improved and pupils' attitudes to reading are high. They are aware that the trend in attainment by the end Year 6 has been broadly average and have provided additional support to stretch and challenge the most able to reach their potential. Consequently, increasing proportions are on track to reach the higher levels.

- Those newly appointed to their posts are developing their role of checking the effectiveness of the school's work and the quality of teaching and learning. However, still new to their roles, the actions they have taken or have planned are too recent to have had an impact on accelerating pupils' progress or securing a greater proportion of outstanding teaching.
- As part of their medium touch support for the school, the local authority has provided regular support to check the school's effectiveness since the last inspection, for example by carrying out joint lesson observations with the senior leaders and providing training and support for staff. Plans are in place to support those leaders new to their post over the coming term.
- Good links with other schools, including the successful St Michael's Church Schools federation, exist in a number of areas to help promote pupils' learning and develop staff expertise. One example, within the Maidstone West collaboration, has highlighted the inconsistencies in marking. Recent improvements in the quality of marking have been seen as staff benefit from sharing the expertise of other colleagues and their marking. Senior leaders have effectively shared their experience and skills when supporting a local primary school.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors are increasingly linking their visits with the priorities highlighted in the school improvement plan. As a result they have a good understanding of the school's priorities for improvement. They draw their knowledge of how well the school is doing in relation to other schools nationally through their experience across the federation as well as an increasingly effective working knowledge of the information about pupils' progress. This enables them to challenge as well as support school leaders and hold them to account for pupils' achievement. They know about the quality of teaching and that teachers' progression on the salary scale is dependent on their performance. Governors have a good grasp of how the pupil premium and sports funding are used. They can explain how the budget is used and for the pupil premium what the impact has been. They have good procedures in place to make sure safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	118625
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	426476

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Junior
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	162
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Jeanette Ardley
<b>Headteacher</b>	Lorna Priddle
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	29 February–1 March 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01622 751502
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