

St Mary's CofE Academy, Stotfold

Rook Tree Lane, Stotfold, Hitchin, SG5 4DL

Inspection dates

5–6 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	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		Require improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Pupils, especially those from advantaged starting points, do not make the progress they could. As a result, achievement requires improvement.
- By the time they leave, more-able pupils do not make the progress they could, particularly in writing.
- There is too much teaching that is not good to ensure consistently good progress.
- Teachers do not regularly use the information about what pupils can already do to plan effectively what pupils will learn.
- Teachers do not mark pupils' work well enough and so pupils are not clear about what they have done well or what they need to do next.
- Leaders and managers do not have a clear view of how well pupils are doing and, as a result, have not acted effectively to improve outcomes for some groups across the school.
- Subject leaders are not clear about what could to be improved in their subject to develop the quality of teaching. They do not sufficiently understand the information the school holds about pupils' progress.
- The management of teachers' performance is not effective in providing useful training and this has not helped teaching to be good in the school.
- Governors do not question leaders robustly enough or hold them to account for the progress pupils make across the school.

The school has the following strengths

- More pupils than is typical make good progress in mathematics.
- Pupils work hard in lessons, handle equipment safely and behave well around the school.
- Pupils in Reception make good progress in their understanding of number and develop mature social and emotional skills.
- The school promotes pupils' confidence and they are happy to come to school because they trust the adults to help them.
- Pupils respond in a grown-up way to lessons which ask them to reflect on issues of right and wrong as well as when learning about different cultures.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 13 parts of lessons. Of these, five observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher or the assistant headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, four school governors, the subject leader for English, the special educational needs leader and the Early Years Foundation Stage leader.
- Discussions were held with groups of pupils. The behaviour of pupils was observed around the school and on the playground at lunch and break times.
- Inspectors listened to some Year 2 pupils read.
- Inspectors scrutinised the behaviour and incident logs, minutes of governing body meetings, action plans and school performance information.
- A selection of pupils' work from across the school was looked at.
- Inspectors talked to parents before school, and also took into account the views of the 70 parents who completed the online questionnaire, Parent View.
- Inspectors took account of the 19 questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

David Cousins, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Matthew Klimcke

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mary's CofE Academy is an average sized primary school.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well below average and very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. No pupils are supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs.
- Below average numbers of pupils are supported by extra funding through the pupil premium. In this school it applies to pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals.
- St Mary's CE converted to become an academy school on 1 April 2012. When its predecessor school, St Mary's CE Lower School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- The headteacher is new to the post this term.
- There is a children's centre on the site which is run by the governing body but is inspected separately.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that all the teaching is good or better by making sure that:
 - teachers use information about what pupils can already do to plan more challenging activities
 - marking of pupils' work and feedback consistently identify what pupils do well and clearly inform them of what they can do better.
- Improve the progress of pupils, including the more able, particularly in writing.
- Improve leadership and management so that it:
 - looks regularly and more robustly at the progress of pupils and teaching and takes action where teaching is not good enough or pupils fall behind
 - holds subject leaders to account for improvements in their subject areas and the achievement of pupils.
- Improve the skills of governors to ensure they:
 - challenge leaders more effectively and hold them to account for the progress pupils make
 - check carefully on the management of teachers' performance and the decisions on pay so it helps leaders to ensure teaching improves.

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

- By Year 4, too few pupils make good progress, particularly in writing. The school has not recognised this problem and has not tackled the progress pupils make across the school, so achievement requires improvement.
- The information collected by the school about how well pupils learn shows that much more could be expected of the more-able pupils in writing so that their performance matches that of the higher numbers who make good progress in mathematics.
- Opportunities to write in other subjects are limited. These limited opportunities do not help pupils to extend their writing skills regularly or to practise using more complex vocabulary, so that the more-able writers make better progress.
- In the Key Stage 1 tests in 2013, standards were above average but these pupils joined the school with above expected levels of skill and knowledge so their progress still requires improvement.
- Pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium funding made similar progress to others and, in 2013, remained about five months behind others in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Disabled pupils or those with special educational needs make the same progress as the other pupils. The difference in achievement between this group and others is very small and the support provided by the school helps these pupils to attain well.
- Pupils join the school with skills and knowledge above expected levels. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage in their understanding of number and their social and personal skills but slower progress in writing.
- Children in the Reception Year learn most effectively when they are working with adults and when choosing activities for themselves because resources provide well for learning through play.
- Most pupils start at the school with good skills in reading and this helps them to attain above expected levels. Pupils enjoy a wide range of books and talk enthusiastically about the ones they like.
- In 2013 the results of the phonics screening check (the sounds that letters make) were well above those found in most schools. In the Year 1 phonics check the results in 2012 were well below expected levels. However, by the time these pupils were re-checked at the end of Year 2, they had all reached the expected levels.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Sometimes, lessons are not planned well enough to ensure that pupils' work is not too easy for them. This means that the progress pupils make in lessons is variable. For example, in a reading session, the more-able pupils were not asked to use the new words they had found in their reading and so improve their skills.
- Pupils' writing skills are not built on in other subjects effectively. For example, in topic folders, more-able writers produced work with spelling errors and, because all the work set is the same, they were not encouraged to use complex vocabulary or use their understanding of different styles of recording factual information to develop their skills.
- Pupils' work in books and on the large number of worksheets is ticked regularly but the comments by teachers are sometimes negative. These do not help pupils to see how well they have done and teachers do not regularly write comments which would help pupils to know what they need to concentrate on in the next lesson. As a result, pupils are not clear about how they could improve their understanding or skills.
- Pupils' attitudes are positive, they like their school and try really hard in lessons. This is because relationships in classrooms are good and pupils know that adults will help them. For example, a

small group of pupils in a Year 3/4 class received regular and very effective support from a teaching assistant and they knew this helped them to learn effectively about punctuating direct speech.

- Support for pupils identified as having a special education need is appropriately planned and adults ensure pupils are encouraged by the extra work they do.
- The impact of teaching assistants in supporting pupils with their work is good. Most are skilled at asking the right questions and encourage pupils to think deeply but few support the teachers in making sure that more-able pupils progress well.
- In Reception, adults set out a wide range of well-resourced and interesting activities for children to choose from. Regular checks are made on whether children are learning effectively through their play and staff use questioning to provide a suitable level of challenge. This means pupils' confidence and their ability to use number effectively improves well and many exceed the goals set.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils say they enjoy coming to school and feel safe because they trust their teachers. They are proud of their school and take good care of it. No litter is dropped and the school's records and pupils' comments show that the good behaviour seen during the inspection is typical of that found every day. Corridors are usually quiet and purposeful places as pupils move around the school and at break times they enthusiastically go outside.
- Teachers and pupils get on well, there are good routines established for working together and pupils follow instructions without fuss. Pupils are well equipped for their lessons and settle very quickly to their work.
- A significant majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View and those spoken to as they brought their children to school said their children are well looked after and are safe in school. Almost all thought behaviour was good.
- On the playground, pupils play well together and enjoy the chance to show off a new 'quiet area' where they have lots of games and can share their thoughts on a prayer board. They are considerate and kind to one another as they play and responsible Year 4 pupils act as 'playground buddies' to ensure everyone gets on well together.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils talk about how lessons help them assess the risks that they face, for example when surfing the internet, and have a mature view of the dangers they face when crossing the road or playing near water.
- Pupils have a good awareness of all the different forms of bullying, including cyber bullying. There are very few incidents of inappropriate behaviour or bullying and pupils are confident in the teachers' ability to deal with any that do arise.
- The school values are promoted well and adults ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to thrive and that there is no discrimination of any kind.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership requires improvement because not enough has been done to improve teaching and this means the achievement of groups of pupils is not good enough.
- Procedures for checking the work of the school, such as observing teaching and analysing information on pupils' progress, by leaders, including the leaders of key subjects, are not effective. The findings from these activities are not used systematically to focus on the progress of specific groups, such as the more able.
- The systems for managing the performance of teachers have not been effective in improving the teaching of a few members of staff. A few teachers have benefited from appropriate training to meet the targets set to improve their practice but lesson observations do not always

look closely enough at the effect that teaching is having on pupils' learning.

- The new headteacher provides a strong sense of purpose and direction to the school and has already identified some of the key improvements. There has been insufficient time to see the impact of any actions taken.
- The range of subjects and additional activities interests all groups of pupils and promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils are enthusiastic about the topics and subjects they study and particularly enjoy mathematics and lessons where they investigate and make things.
- The arrangements for ensuring that adults are checked prior to starting work in the school meet requirements. The school works well with local agencies and has positive relationships with the majority of parents and carers, involving them appropriately in their children's learning. As one parent, among others, said: 'I am happy with the school and am confident that they teach my child well.' Another reflected on the positive changes the new headteacher had made quickly to the school.
- There are good arrangements for allocating the primary school sport funding. For instance, the school has a physical education specialist who has improved and widened opportunities for pupils to take part in sports activities.
- Attendance has improved and continues to be above average and exclusions remain exceptionally rare. The strong focus on pupils' personal development and the supportive atmosphere of the school mean that pupils make good progress in developing mature and sensible attitudes to school and enjoy their time together.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are committed to the school's success but do not effectively question leaders about pupils' achievements. This means they do not hold leaders sufficiently to account for the progress pupils make and they do not look carefully enough at data and the way specific groups in the school achieve relative to the other pupils.
 - Governors do not effectively challenge or discuss how well the school's pay structure is linked to staff performance and decisions about pay. They have an over-optimistic view of the quality of teaching and the actions which could be taken to improve this. The headteacher has not yet had targets set for her initial work in the school.
 - Governors manage finances effectively. They are familiar with how the pupil premium funding is used, although not clear how they would independently check that it is having the intended impact on pupils' progress. They ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures meet national 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

Unique reference number	138022
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	440688

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	5–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Street
Headteacher	Sam Bishop
Date of previous school inspection	n/a
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