

St Michael's Church of England Combined School

Chapel Square, Stewkley, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 0HA

Inspection dates 19–20 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- Pupils learn well and make good progress throughout the school. This is due to good teaching and the pupils' positive attitudes to learning.
- The headteacher leads the school effectively, and has the respect of the pupils, staff and parents. Effective oversight of teaching helps maintain the teaching quality.
- The good quality of teaching is because the school is an exciting place to learn. High expectations encourage the pupils to attempt work that really makes them think.
- Safety is good; pupils are well aware of how to keep safe.
- Pupils behave well in the classroom and around the school. They are very helpful to each other.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly. Good work is praised and there are clear instructions on how to improve.
- The governing body has a wide range of expertise, and its members both support and challenge the school.
- The large majority of parents are very supportive of the school and are positive partners in their children's learning.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Girls do not do as well as boys. Progress in mathematics is slower than in reading or writing.
- Pupils' learning is not always as fast as it could be when work is not set at the right level of difficulty.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 16 lessons, with most teachers being observed twice. Two lessons were observed jointly with the headteacher. The inspection included observations of playtime, lunchtime and assembly. Inspectors looked at pupils' work and heard some pupils read.
- Meetings were held with pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and three other members, and other members of staff with specific responsibilities.
- The lead inspector had a telephone conversation with a representative of the Buck's Learning Trust, which supplies monitoring and support services to the school.
- The inspectors took account of the 48 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 27 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school's data on pupils' progress, planning and monitoring documentation, and records relating to pupils' behaviour, attendance, safeguarding and the performance management of teachers.

Inspection team

John Taylor, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Bimla Thakur

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average-sized primary school.
- There is one class for each year from Reception to Year 6.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional funding for looked after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children from service families, is low.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- There is a pre-school group on site, but it is not managed by the governing body and will be inspected separately.
- The headteacher took up her post in January 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching from good to outstanding by ensuring that:
 - pupils' work is set at the right level of difficulty for pupils of all abilities.
 - pupils' learning is checked frequently so that pupils have a secure understanding of the work they have been asked to do and always respond to the comments teachers make when marking their work.
- Frequently check the progress of the different groups of pupils, so that effective action can be taken quickly to help girls make as much progress as boys and to enable all pupils to do as well in mathematics as they do in reading and writing.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children enter the Reception class with levels just above that expected for their age. They learn quickly because of the good teaching and wide variety of different activities with a strong focus on developing their literacy skills.
- In the national check of the Year 1 pupils' knowledge of phonics, (the sounds letters make), the proportion of pupils who have reached the expected level has been in line with the national average for the past two years. Most of the pupils who did not reach the expected level last year, have done so by half way through Year 2.
- Over time, pupils' attainment in Key Stage 1 has been well above average for most groups. Attainment in reading has been consistently high. The school's information shows that last year's dip in mathematics has been successfully reversed.
- Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 has been above average in reading and writing. Their progress in mathematics is now good due to the effective action taken by the school leaders. This has been achieved by making the work more challenging and the marking more helpful.
- The most-able pupils make good progress, especially in writing, due to appropriate work being set and the pupils' positive attitudes to learning.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are accurately assessed, well supported and make good progress.
- In reading, the very small number of pupils benefiting from the pupil premium was at the same level as most other pupils in the school. In writing they were about six months behind, and in mathematics they were about eighteen months behind. The school has taken action to tackle this, providing a range of support which reflects its strong commitment to promoting equality of opportunity. There is evidence that this has been effective in improving the pace of learning for a minority of these pupils, and the gap is now narrowing.
- Girls do not attain as well as boys, especially in mathematics. The school's records and inspectors' observations show that the gap in the younger classes is closing quickly.

The quality of teaching is good

- Over time, teachers have created classrooms that are exciting places to learn. Pupils enjoy the lessons and learn quickly. Pupils are eager to tackle work that really makes them think because much is expected of them and they want to do their best.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage learn through a wide range of activities covering all areas of learning. They have good opportunities to choose activities for themselves and learn through play. Pupils practise and try out new ideas successfully on small whiteboards when tackling new areas of learning. In one class pupils worked together from a large screen as they discussed the improvements that could be made to a piece of work and then apply the ideas to make their own work better.
- Marking is especially strong in the older classes. It is regular, encouraging and provides clear steps on how the work can be improved. Opportunities are provided for pupils to respond to the marking and show they have learnt from it. This is not the case throughout the school, however, and in some cases pupils do not have the opportunities to respond to the teachers' marking.
- Older pupils are aware of their standards of work, which levels they are aiming for and have a clear idea of what they need to do to achieve these.
- Phonics, the sounds letters make, is well taught. Children are given good opportunities to practise recently-introduced letter sounds in their writing to reinforce the new learning and help their writing and spelling.
- Occasionally, pupils do not make as much progress as they should because work is not hard

enough for them.

- Teaching assistants are used well to support groups of pupils and ensure they remain focused on their work. They skilfully ask questions to guide the pupils' learning.
- Pupils say they enjoy learning and their homework. A very large majority of parents who filled in the online questionnaire, Parent View, think their children are well taught.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour of the pupils is good. Pupils say most pupils behave well for most of the time. School records show that behaviour is well managed and typically good over time.
- Pupils are usually motivated and keen to get on with their work, but there are a few occasions when some pupils lose concentration and there is a small degree of low level disturbance.
- Pupils behave well around the school and at lunchtime. A buddying system throughout the school ensures that pupils know each other well and have care and consideration for younger children.
- In lessons, pupils show a good attitude to work, are eager to learn and very willing to contribute. They are very cooperative and support each other's learning. They move swiftly from one activity to another and are good at following instructions, so their learning can move on quickly. Pupils know the difference between teasing and bullying. They say that on the very rare occasions that bullying takes place it is effectively dealt with by the teachers. A small minority of parents disagree.
- The school's work to keep the pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel safe in school, and parents agree. Every week the children in Reception fill in a risk assessment. They check to see all aprons are hung up, all taps turned off, and the floor is safe and dry. This teaches the children to be mindful of safety issues and behave in a safe way.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. Older pupils are aware of how to keep safe on the internet, and on social media. They have had visits from the local police telling them how to deal with cyber bullying, and there is also a road safety programme for pupils.
- The support for vulnerable pupils is good, their progress is carefully monitored and this enables them to make good progress.
- There have been few exclusions in recent years, attendance has been consistently high and the pupils are punctual to school and lessons.

The leadership and management are good

- Staff, parents, pupils and governors have confidence in the good leadership of the school. The headteacher has successfully led the school to reverse the decline in achievement.
- The school's system for checking pupils' progress has helped senior staff identify and effectively address any under performance in teaching. It has also shown them details of individual pupils who are in danger of falling behind. However, the school's checks on how well different groups of pupils perform mean that patterns of emerging gaps in progress are not always tackled as quickly as they should be.
- Teachers and most support staff have performance targets. These are well monitored and linked to the school's priorities and the Teachers' Standards. However, it is not always clear how the impact of their targets is going to be measured.
- Checks on the quality of teaching and learning, such as looking at pupils' work books and observing lessons, enable strengths and aspects for development to be identified.
- Pupil premium funds are targeted at the increasing number of pupils eligible for support, so that they have similar opportunities as others. Extra staffing hours afforded by this funding are used to help these pupils to do well.
- The school's curriculum is strong and based on a Christian ethos. The moral focus is linked closely to the expectation that pupils enjoy learning and are willing to help each other. Pupils

learn about other religions and compare these to their own. Teachers from adjacent years plan together, which brings breath to the curriculum and ensures the work interests the pupils. Opportunities to use literacy skills across the curriculum are very well exploited.

- The primary sports funding has enabled pupils to engage in a greater range of sporting activity than previously, including competitive sport. It is also to be used to enhance the teachers' own skills in teaching physical education.
- The Bucks Learning Trust has monitored the school's performance, provided good support and helped the school successfully overcome things which were slowing pupils' progress. The school works closely with two other local schools to develop its middle leaders and plan for the future.
- The school improvement plan has the correct priorities for the school's future development. However, not all of the objectives are clearly linked to the required outcome or how the success is going to be measured.
- The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. The children are happy and eager to learn and well prepared for their next stage in moving to Year 1. Systems for checking the children's progress are not sufficiently robust to be used to guide the children's learning.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have an accurate knowledge of the school's strengths and the areas that need to develop. They are kept well informed of the pupils' performance during the year, and challenge the school about any underperformance. They check things out for themselves by visiting the school regularly. This helps them support the school and adds strength to any challenge they make.
 - Governors are aware of how the sports funding is used. They have an accurate knowledge of the quality of teaching and how underperformance has been tackled. They know that teachers' performance is linked to pay. They are aware of how the pupil premium funding is spent, but are less sure of its impact on eligible pupils' achievement. They have ensured safeguarding meets statutory requirements. They rigorously, and frequently, check the school's finances.

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	110414
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	432076

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	187
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Neil Clarke
Headteacher	Katharine Passmore
Date of previous school inspection	25–26 June 2009
Telephone number	01525 240248
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