

St Mary's Junior Mixed School

St Mary's Way, Baldock, SG7 6HY

Inspection dates 18–19 March 2014

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		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Teaching is not consistently good enough to ensure that pupils make good progress year on year in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils' achievement has not been consistently good over time.
- Pupils' skills for solving problems in mathematics are not developed well.
- Teachers do not always set tasks that are demanding enough for all ability groups, especially the more-able pupils.
- Marking does not consistently help pupils to improve their work.
- Pupils have insufficient opportunities to improve their writing skills in different subjects.
- Teachers are not doing enough to help pupils to develop good handwriting and presentation skills.
- Subject leaders, particularly those new to the role, are not yet fully involved in the drive to improve teaching and raise standards.

The school has the following strengths

- Following a period when pupils underachieved, standards started to rise in 2013 and pupils are making much faster progress this year.
- The headteacher, supported by some other leaders and the governors, checks teaching rigorously. Their action has improved progress, achievement and the quality of teaching.
- Pupils behave well. They develop a good understanding of the cultural diversity within the society and value others' beliefs and ways of life.
- Governors have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. They are confident in holding leaders to account for its performance.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching in 13 lessons, of which three were observed jointly with the headteacher. In addition, they made a number of other short visits to lessons and learning areas, and heard pupils in Years 3 and 6 reading.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils, members of staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors took account of 47 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), and 22 responses to the staff questionnaire. They also sought the views of parents through informal discussions at the start of the school day.
- The inspector looked at pupils' books and a number of documents, including the school's own data on pupils' current attainment and progress, the school's evaluation of its performance, improvement plans, documentation relating to teachers' performance over time and records relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Tusharkana Chakraborti, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Gillian Walley

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mary's is an average-sized junior school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. There are small numbers of pupils from minority ethnic groups and a few who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium, which in this school provides additional funding for pupils in local authority care or known to be eligible for free school meals, is above average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is well above average, as is the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.
- There have been some changes to the structure of the senior leadership team and the governing body in the past year. The Chair of the Governing Body is relatively new to her role and three new teachers have joined the school since September 2013.
- The school is a member of the Baldock Network, a local consortium of seven primary schools and a secondary school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to good or better and raise achievement in all subjects further by ensuring that:
 - teachers use assessment information effectively to set tasks in lessons that are sufficiently demanding for pupils of all abilities, particularly the most able
 - pupils receive clear guidance from marking on how to improve their work, and teachers check that they respond to the advice given
 - greater emphasis is placed on the development of pupils' presentation and handwriting skills
 - pupils have more opportunities to write at length for a range of purposes and audiences in all subjects, and to apply their numeracy skills to solve problems in mathematics.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management further by developing the capacity of subject leaders, including those new to their posts, to check and improve teaching and learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The progress of pupils by the end of Year 6 has not been good for some time because teaching has not been consistently good. Consequently, pupils have not always attained their best standards, especially the more-able pupils.
- Pupils' attainment rose in 2013 to above average in reading, writing and mathematics, reflecting faster progress than in previous years. However, this does not show the full picture. The pupils leaving the school last year in Year 6 had not received consistently good teaching from their point of entry in Year 3. Although most pupils made rapid progress in their final year, they had not made enough progress overall from when they joined the school with above-average standards in Year 3.
- Achievement since September 2013 shows significant improvement on previous years. Lesson observations, the school's own data on pupils' progress and the work seen in pupils' books show that progress in all subjects has accelerated markedly over the past year. Pupils are currently on track to reach standards that are higher than those of 2013 at the end of Year 6.
- Pupils read from an extensive range of texts and are gaining an increasing understanding of different styles of writing. However, they do not get enough opportunities to write in sufficient depth in different subjects. Pupils do not develop their handwriting and presentation skills to a consistently good standard. In mathematics, pupils have limited opportunity to develop problem-solving skills.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make similar progress to their classmates. This is because they are supported increasingly well in one-to-one and small-group sessions which effectively help them to learn. Pupils who speak English as an additional language, and those from minority ethnic groups, achieve as well as and sometimes better than their classmates.
- Pupils supported through pupil premium funding achieve as well as the others. This is because the school is providing a range of effective support designed to boost their learning and narrow the gap between their attainment and that of other pupils in the school. In 2013, the eligible pupils in Year 6 were on average two terms behind their classmates in reading and writing and three terms behind them in mathematics; this was an improvement over the previous year.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teachers have not ensured that pupils acquire all the key skills necessary for them to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Teaching has improved significantly over the past two terms, and the work in pupils' books and the lessons observed during this inspection show that teaching is now typically good. However, it has not yet resulted in consistently good achievement in all subjects throughout the school.
- Teachers do not always show high enough expectations for what their pupils can achieve, and do not always use assessment information effectively to ensure that all groups, particularly the more-able pupils, are stretched to reach the standards of which they are capable.
- Teachers do not promote pupils' handwriting and presentation skills to ensure that the work

pupils complete in their books is always the best they can do. They do not always ensure that pupils extend their writing skills sufficiently through writing for different purposes in different subjects. In mathematics, pupils are given limited opportunity to develop their problem-solving skills.

- Teachers mark work regularly. Some teachers provide the clear guidance that pupils need to help them improve their work, but not consistently so. Not all teachers ensure that pupils respond to these suggestions and, as a result, pupils often repeat their mistakes.
- There is a positive climate for learning in lessons and pupils respond readily to tasks, showing interest and enthusiasm. Relationships are good and behaviour is managed well in all classes.
- Teachers show good subject knowledge and ask probing questions to check on pupils' understanding and build on what they already know. For example, in a mathematics lesson in Year 6, the teacher asked demanding questions to make sure that pupils developed a good understanding of different strategies for short and long division. In most lessons, the teaching assistants are used effectively to give pupils the help they need to improve their work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They have positive attitudes to learning and get on well in lessons without disruption. They behave well even when lesson activities are not demanding enough, although they sometimes lose focus.
- Pupils are courteous and respectful of each other and adults. There are good procedures for adults to manage pupils' behaviour. These are applied consistently and pupils respond well to them. Pupils are proud of their school and thrive in the caring environment where everyone is valued and trusted.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel safe at school and all parents who responded to the online Parent View survey agree with their children's views. Pupils have a good understanding about e-safety and how to guard their personal details. They are considerate and concerned about the safety of others because these issues are often included in lessons and in the school's work with parents.
- Pupils say that there is very little bullying in the school. Most are confident that if it did occur it would be dealt with quickly and fairly. Pupils show a good understanding of different forms of bullying, including name-calling, racism and cyber bullying.
- Pupils demonstrate a good sense of responsibility through their commitment to school council work and various fundraising activities. For example, they raise funds for charities such as the local hospice and Sports Relief as well as for several international charities to support children in other countries. Older pupils successfully fulfil their role as 'reading buddies' for pupils in Year 3 and enjoy reading with them.
- Attendance has been average over the past two years and improved in the current year. This is because the school has worked hard with external agencies and parents over the past year to raise attendance.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, effectively supported by governors, staff and local authority, is successfully driving improvement in teaching and achievement. Together, they have taken effective action since the last inspection, and particularly during the current school year, to arrest the decline in standards and to raise achievement across the school. Consequently, pupils' achievement is now improving rapidly.
- Recent changes in systems and personnel have strengthened leadership and management. In the past, checks on teaching have not always focused in enough detail on the progress made by different groups of pupils. A revised system is now helping staff to measure progress more rigorously. The subject leaders, including those new to their posts, are determined to improve the quality of teaching and to speed up pupils' progress. They have not yet fully established their roles in checking teaching and learning in their areas accurately and effectively.
- The headteacher checks regularly on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress and sets teachers demanding targets for improvement, which are always linked closely to the attainment and progress of pupils in the class that they teach. Systems to manage staff performance are robust. Appropriate support and training are provided for all staff to improve their performance.
- Pupils' enjoyment of learning is enhanced by a range of clubs and visits to places of interest. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through assemblies, religious studies and topic work. There is a strong focus on teaching music, art and French. The 'Protective Behaviour' programme helps pupils to reflect on their rights and responsibilities. This makes a strong contribution to their behaviour and attitudes to learning.
- The school has made good progress in ensuring equality of opportunity, but leaders are aware that there are still a few areas, including ensuring that work is equally challenging for all pupils, that need to be strengthened.
- The primary schools sports funding is being spent on a full-time sports coach, equipment, a wide range of sporting opportunities and training staff to enhance their expertise in this area. This has resulted in increased participation by pupils and a positive impact on their health and well-being.
- The local authority has provided effective support and has helped the school to bring about improvement. Leaders and governors work closely with the designated school improvement officer to achieve this.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors have received appropriate training and are well informed about the strengths and weaknesses of the school's work. They are fully aware of the period of underachievement the school went through and worked well with leaders and external partners to halt the decline in standards. Governors know what information they need to make secure judgements about the school's performance so that they are able to hold leaders to account and to link decisions on teachers' pay to the progress of their pupils. They challenge leaders and ask searching questions about how any underperformance in teaching and in pupils' achievement is being addressed. The governing body monitors the allocation and impact of pupil premium funds rigorously, ensuring that it is used to raise the achievement of these particular pupils. Governors ensure that the procedures for safeguarding pupils meet the 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	117385
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	430756

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	240
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rosemary Charsley
Headteacher	Patricia Jenkins
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2012
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