

St George's Lower School

East Street, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 1EW

Inspection dates 8–9 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	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.

- Standards by the end of Year 2 have been rising rapidly with each passing year and are now average.
- Pupils make good progress across the school from their different starting points.
- Teaching is consistently good and there are high expectations of all pupils.
- Pupils from the Traveller community make good progress. The school supports them well.
- All groups of pupils achieve well, including those supported by the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to a good start.
- Pupils behave well and have positive attitudes to learning.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe is outstanding. Every pupil is valued as an individual and helped to succeed.
- Leaders, managers and governors have worked very well together to make sure the school has improved rapidly since its previous inspection.
- Through rigorous checks and high quality training, they have been successful in moving all teaching to at least good, and causing standards to rise year-on-year.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Standards in writing are not as strong as those in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils do not have enough chance to write at length, especially in subjects other than English.
- The presentation of pupils' work and their handwriting are sometimes untidy.
- Attendance is below average. The school does not do enough to reward good attendance on a regular basis.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 12 lessons or parts of lessons, including some jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- The inspector heard pupils read and, with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, looked closely at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector looked at a wide range of school documents, including development plans, policies, self-evaluation reports, monitoring files, safeguarding and subject materials, evidence of the school's partnership work and information for families.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils chosen at random. Discussions were held with school staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Vice Chair and three other governors, and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector noted 11 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke informally to parents in the playground.
- The inspector considered the 18 staff questionnaires that were completed.

Inspection team

Nick Butt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school. Pupils leave at the end of Year 4.
- Pupils are taught in single-age classes, except Years 2 and 3, which are taught together.
- Most pupils are White British. A significant proportion have Traveller heritage.
- Many pupils join or leave the school part way through their primary school careers.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (which in this school provides additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those with a parent in the armed services or those looked after by the local authority) is well above average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportions supported at school action plus, or with a statement of special educational needs, are above average.
- Since the previous inspection, the school was planning to convert to become an academy, but this fell through, creating a period of uncertainty.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in writing to match those in reading and mathematics by:
 - giving pupils more opportunities to write at length, especially in other subjects other than English
 - improving the presentation of pupils' work, including their handwriting.
- Increase attendance at least to the national average by finding ways on a regular basis to reward those pupils whose attendance is good.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children join the school with skills that are below those typical for their age, especially in their knowledge and understanding of the world and in language and communication. They get off to a good start in the spacious and well-organised Reception class, as the activities are stimulating and focus effectively on developing their basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics. Children are well prepared for Year 1.
- The school has adopted well-structured programmes for teaching reading, writing and mathematics in small groups, and this helps pupils to make good progress. Work is well tailored to their needs.
- In 2013, standards by the end of Year 2 were average, and have been rapidly rising with each passing year from a position which was well below average a few years ago.
- Year 1 pupils have not performed well in the past in the checks on their knowledge of phonics (the sounds that letters represent in words). The present Year 1 pupils show good understanding and use their phonic skills effectively to read unfamiliar words.
- Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 3 and 4 because the teaching is consistently strong and there are high expectations of all pupils. In 2013, attainment was close to that expected for the Year 4 pupils. This group of pupils had only reached standards that were well-below average at the end of Year 2, and so their progress during their two years in Key Stage 2 was good.
- There is a high turnover of pupils in the school, and this means pupils often join later in their school careers, many with particular needs, and yet they settle quickly and achieve well. This is because the school has excellent systems to support them and each pupil is treated as an individual and is known well by all staff.
- The current Year 4 have all, already, made the nationally expected progress for the start of Year 5 with a term still to go. This group of pupils has a wide range of needs, but all are making at least good progress.
- Pupils develop a love of reading and older pupils read widely and speak with enthusiasm about their books.
- Pupils learn mathematical skills systematically and are confident in solving problems. They are able to apply their skills to a range of everyday situations. The school has already updated the way it teaches mathematics to take into account the forthcoming changes in the National Curriculum.
- Pupils' attainment in writing is not as strong as it is in reading and mathematics. This is because pupils do not write enough at length, especially in subjects such as history and science. The presentation of their work varies. While there are some good examples, of neat topic work in particular, sometimes handwriting is untidy.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium make good progress like their classmates. In 2013, there were too few eligible pupils in Year 2 to comment on their attainment without the risk of identifying them. The school's performance information shows that, across the school, gaps in

attainment between pupils supported by the pupil premium and the others are closing.

- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs achieve well from their different starting points. They receive good support from teaching assistants and their progress is followed closely to make sure they are catching up their peers.
- Pupils of Traveller heritage make good progress when they are in school. Their attainment varies because they sometimes miss large chunks of schooling when they are away travelling.
- The school challenges its most-able pupils well, and ensures that they perform as well as they can.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good across the school, resulting in all pupils achieving well. Relationships between pupils and staff are excellent, and pupils are well motivated to learn.
- Both teachers and support staff contribute fully to pupils' good progress. The programmes for teaching reading, writing and mathematics give pupils a solid grounding in basic skills and enable them to progress at a rapid pace.
- No pupil is held back from reaching their potential, as in every group the work is sufficiently demanding for them. For example, in Year 4, pupils were learning to read and write coordinates in four quadrants and were challenging one another by setting their own questions for their friends to solve. The teacher was quick to make sure they were recording their results accurately.
- All teaching staff have good subject knowledge and are confident in explaining new ideas to pupils, making sure they fully understand and extending their thinking, for example through probing questioning.
- Children in Reception learn quickly because they are given enjoyable and exciting activities which promote their early reading and writing skills. They have every opportunity to find out about the world around them. For example, they were buzzing with enthusiasm as they tried on bee-keeping protective clothing and learnt about how honey is made.
- teachers' marking is regular and shows pupils how to improve their work. Pupils enjoy earning stickers when they have met their targets for reaching the next level of attainment.
- The skills of writing are taught well, but pupils do not have enough opportunity to apply what they know in extended writing, particularly in different subjects.

The behaviour and safety of pupils is good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They have positive attitudes to learning and work hard. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about their educational experiences. They are polite and considerate of one another.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils commented how safe they feel at school. One said, 'We have nothing to be worried about.' Pupils say bullying is not an issue and school records confirm this. Pupils understand about different forms of bullying

such as cyber-bullying and know how to keep safe on the internet.

- The school council is active in raising funds. Pupils are currently involved in improving the pond area.
- Attendance was very low in 2013. Since then, it has improved, but is still below average. The school is required to record as an authorised absence all the days when its many Traveller children are travelling around the country. This has a disproportionate impact on its figures.
- The school works closely with families whose children miss a lot of school for unacceptable reasons and this is having a positive impact. However, it does not currently reward good attendance on a frequent basis, for example through holding a weekly class competition, and so motivate pupils who can to attend school as much as possible.
- Behaviour is not outstanding because occasionally pupils become restless in class, and do not concentrate as well as they should, for example in presenting their work neatly.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have steered the school through a period of uncertainty since its previous inspection with unwavering determination to improve teaching and raise standards. They have been successful in making all teaching at least consistently good, and standards have been rising year-on-year.
- Much of their success is down to rigorous checks on the quality of teaching, careful tracking of pupils' progress, and high quality training for staff. Effective action is then taken to address any issues that are identified. Teaching staff are very positive about the way their skills are developed and how they are encouraged to take on new responsibilities.
- Staff have valued the opportunity to film themselves teaching, using an unobtrusive camera, and the footage has helped them to reflect on their practice and identify areas for improvement. A particular strength is the way staff are encouraged to study for additional qualifications, and for some non-teaching staff to work towards achieving qualified teacher status.
- Even though the school has faced many challenges, staff morale is high and there is a shared commitment to doing the very best for the pupils. The school provides excellent pastoral care to pupils whose circumstances might make them vulnerable, and their families. Staff make sure that all pupils have equal opportunities to succeed in an atmosphere where discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. Those pupils supported by the pupil premium benefit from additional one-to-one and small-group teaching. This ensures they keep up with their peers.
- The school offers a wide range of interesting subjects and topics which are tailored to pupils' needs. These promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils' different cultures are celebrated, including those of Traveller heritage. A good range of visits, visitors and clubs enrich the subjects that are taught.
- The primary school sports premium is being spent wisely on a local sports partnership which provides coaching for pupils, training for staff, and participation in school tournaments. Pupils are also able to enjoy more sports clubs. The impact of this is to improve the quality of physical education teaching in the school, and to give pupils more opportunity to take part in a variety of sports, with benefits to their health and well-being.

- Parents are mainly positive about the work of the school, and appreciate the support they and their children receive. The school engages very well with social services and other agencies.
- The local authority has provided good quality support for the school, its leaders, managers and governors. This has contributed to the rapid progress since the previous inspection, especially during a period of uncertainty when it was not clear whether the school was going to become an academy or not.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a good understanding of the quality of teaching and pupils' performance. They visit regularly, including as volunteers, to see the work of the school first hand. They are actively involved with staff in evaluating how well the school is doing. They make sure that staff are set challenging targets and that pay is linked to good performance. They know how the pupil premium and sports premium are being spent and the impact they are having. Governors challenge school leaders to keep improving, and have been influential in helping the school to move from requires improvement to good. They ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet 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	109467
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	441980

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	76
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Pine
Headteacher	Marea Rawlings
Date of previous school inspection	13 December 2012
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