

St Mary's CofE (A) First School

The Heath, Uttoxeter, ST14 7LX

Inspection dates 14–15 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	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		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- There has, until recently, been too much variation in the quality of teaching and pupils' rates of progress. This has prevented them from achieving well in reading, writing and mathematics.
- In some lessons, teachers do not check regularly enough how well all pupils can understand and apply new learning.
- Teachers occasionally do not make clear to more-able pupils what they expect of them or provide them with suitably challenging work.
- The school has not made full use of opportunities available to it to work, train and learn from other schools.
- New middle leaders have not yet developed teaching and learning in their subject areas fully.
- Governors have not acquired all the skills and in-depth understanding of all aspects of the school's work that they need to enable them to contribute fully to school improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- Most Reception children make good progress.
- Teaching has improved considerably in the last two terms. This is helping to increase pupils' progress and to reduce variations in achievement between different year groups.
- Pupils behave well and feel safe in school.
- Attendance has risen to above-average levels.
- The school benefits from some experienced, very capable senior and middle leaders. The headteacher ensures pupils are looked after well.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 15 lessons taught by eight teachers.
- Some pupils in Year 2 were heard reading.
- Meetings were held with school staff, a group of pupils, three governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the six questionnaires completed by staff. They also considered the 25 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and the school's own recent surveys of parents' and pupils' views. An inspector spoke informally to some parents at the beginning of the school day.
- Inspectors looked at a range of evidence including: the work in pupils' books; monitoring records; consultants' reports; the school improvement plan; the school's own data on pupils' attainment and progress; and policies, procedures and practice relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Derek Aitken, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Susan Dennison

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 to transfer to their next school.
- The school has experienced significant staffing disruption in the last eighteen months. Three new permanent staff, including the deputy headteacher, joined the school in September 2013.
- Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. No pupil is at an early stage of learning English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium, which is additional funding for certain groups such as those known to be eligible for free school meals, is broadly average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a single-age Reception class. Most older pupils are taught in mixed-age classes.
- There is a pre-school nursery on the school site, but it is not managed by the governing body and was not part of this inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make teaching consistently good or better by ensuring all teachers:
 - check regularly how well the whole class of pupils are understanding and applying new learning correctly
 - communicate high expectations to more-able pupils and consistently provide them with suitably challenging work.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - developing the quality of the school's partnerships to learn from best practice elsewhere and to improve the robustness of the checks the school makes on its performance
 - ensuring new middle leaders develop teaching and learning in their subject areas fully
 - ensuring governors receive further training to improve their skills and to enable them to make a fully effective contribution to school development.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement requires improvement. Standards overall at the end of Year 4 in 2013 were broadly in line with those expected for this age and most pupils made good progress from their starting points. Pupils' progress and achievement in Years 1 to 3 were variable. Year 2 pupils made good progress and, as a result, attainment in Year 2 rose to above average, but Year 3 pupils, including those known to be eligible for the pupil premium underachieved.
- Gaps in learning in mathematics are evident in the work of some less-able Year 4 pupils. These pupils find it hard to recall their times tables accurately, confuse addition and subtraction signs and make unnecessary mistakes in their calculations. Sometimes the most-able pupils do not make as much progress as they might do when staff's expectations and guidance for their work are not clear enough.
- Children join Reception with levels of skills and aptitudes which are below those expected for their age. Some children are slow to develop the personal and social skills needed to profit fully from staff's questions and their conversations with other children during play. Last year pupils joined Year 1 with below-average attainment.
- Over the last two terms, improvements in teaching and the use of assessment have substantially reduced much of the variation in pupils' achievement. Most Reception children, including vulnerable children, are making good progress. Pupils in Year 4 are making the progress expected of them although not enough are yet achieving well.
- Intensive support programmes are enabling pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding to keep up with their classmates. This group of pupils generally include many disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. In most lessons the progress of these pupils is supported effectively by additional staff.
- New 'hands-on' resources for mathematics are helping to accelerate progress for pupils who find it hard to work out calculations solely by written methods. A wider range of opportunities for pupils to develop their command of sentence structures and to enrich their vocabulary is helping pupils to raise their attainment in writing. These new initiatives have also had a positive impact on pupils' concentration and interest in their learning.
- Results in the Year 1 screening check for phonics (the sounds that letters make) have been above average in the last two years. Year 2 pupils, including the less able, read competently. They understand letters and sounds well and mostly read accurately.
- Assessment records show an improvement in pupils' performance levels in physical education as a result of the primary sports funding, which is spent on coaching and additional sports.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching has, over time, been too variable to ensure that pupils make good progress. Staffing disruption last year, especially in Years 3 and 4, resulted in pupils being taught by a succession of short-term staff. This, combined with elements of weak teaching, meant that a significant number of pupils did not develop their command of basic skills securely.
- Expectations of pupils' work, including the more able, have not been high enough. On a few

occasions pupils are not given work that engages or challenges them fully or they have to wait to be given extra work once they have completed a task.

- Teachers provide helpful individual support when pupils are working on their own, but not all teachers make good use of on-going assessment to summarise pupils' learning for the class and to re-direct it as required. Consequently, pupils' misunderstandings or mistakes sometimes go uncorrected for too long which slows the pace of their learning.
- At other times, however, teachers quickly spot that pupils are struggling with their work, as happened in a mathematics lesson on place value for pupils in Year 2. The task was swiftly adapted to one using smaller numbers and as a consequence, pupils made swifter progress in their understanding.
- The profile of teaching is improving steadily across the school. New teachers are working effectively with the experienced core of skilled teachers to raise pupils' achievement. For example, consistency in marking practice has largely been achieved, so that pupils are provided with clear tips on how they can improve their work and most pupils follow these up conscientiously.
- In phonics, staff ensure that children in Reception are able to apply quickly their new knowledge of long vowel sounds, using a range of media in the outdoor area. In writing in Years 3 and 4, the teacher's skilful use of assessment and new technology enables pupils to quickly improve their understanding of complex sentences quickly.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Most Reception children sustain their interest and concentration and take a full part in activities directed by staff, such as singing sessions.
- Nearly all pupils focus well in lessons and listen carefully to the teacher and each other's responses. Teachers are alert to any pupil who occasionally becomes distracted and regain their attention through astute questioning. New policies for encouraging respectful behaviour are implemented consistently by staff and this, together with teaching improvements, has substantially reduced incidents of low-level disruption in lessons.
- Pupils behave well in corridors, in assemblies and in the dinner hall. They form queues and eat their lunch in an orderly, sensible manner, taking care not to drop litter. Playtimes are enjoyable. Pupils make full use of the playground's attractive facilities to converse happily with each other and to engage in active play.
- Pupils are welcoming to visitors and are keen to share with them their thoughts about school. Pupils report few concerns about behaviour and say that any disputes resulting from minor 'fall-outs' are sorted out by themselves, peer mediators or adults. There has been only one fixed term exclusion in the last two years and no racist incidents have been recorded.
- Attendance rates have risen considerably and now stand at above-average levels. The number of pupils who are persistently absent has declined.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. The headteacher takes the lead role in following up concerns about potentially vulnerable pupils and logs the actions she and her staff take carefully to ensure welfare needs are met. Suitable risk assessments include those for Reception children's mini-beast hunts in the field.

- Pupils feel safe on site, because they trust their friends and staff to support them in the event of any difficulty. They report that bullying is rare.
- Pupils are aware of strategies for staying safe in different situations, including on the internet and on other forms of social media, and when there are strangers near them. They know the difference between bullying and 'fall-outs' because relevant issues have been explored in lessons and in drama performances from visiting theatre companies.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Well-considered actions taken by middle and senior leaders are not yet deeply rooted in the school's work. Leaders' energies were diverted last year to supporting short-term staff, during disruptions to staffing and, as a result, coaching had little impact on raising pupils' achievement.
- Planning for some subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics lacks rigour. New staff have recently become responsible for these parts of the school's work but have yet to develop them fully.
- Some partnerships are under-developed. Joint working arrangements with other schools and the local authority have not been used as effectively as possible to ensure that the school learns from best practice elsewhere. As a result, some parts of the school's self-evaluation are over-generous. Leaders, including governors, have not ensured that evaluations are as rigorous as possible.
- While the local authority has provided the school with useful advice across a range of matters, the overall quantity and quality of support have not been timely or rigorous enough to secure swift improvement.
- The school ensures that there is no discrimination and promotes equal opportunities adequately. The use of pupil premium funding has been reviewed to ensure relevant pupils receive skilled small-group teaching and has provided them with a free after-school club.
- Teamwork has improved as new, permanent staff are keen to develop their skills and to learn from the expertise of capable leaders, for example in the key subjects of reading, writing and mathematics.
- Prayers, singing and other activities make a useful contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils have regular opportunities to reflect on and to discuss the choices they make and the consequences of their actions. This was observed, for example in an assembly led by Year 1 pupils on the 'Gingerbread Man' theme. School councillors are proud of their contribution to decisions made about playground improvements.
- The school is making suitable use of the national sports funding for primary schools. A professional sports coach has been employed to develop pupils' skills and staff's expertise. The range of new sports has been extended and pupils' participation in after-school clubs has increased considerably.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have an adequate overview of strengths and areas for development in pupils' skills and know the classes where teaching is most successful. They have yet to acquire the depth of skills and detailed knowledge of the school's work needed to enable them to evaluate the

school's work robustly and to make a full contribution to its development.

- Governors, under new leadership, are very supportive and fully committed to ensuring the school's future success. In the last six months they have appointed link governors to provide the governing body with a more detailed picture of pupils' achievements and the impact of teaching on pupils' learning.
- They are now more forthcoming in requesting information about pupils' performance and ask challenging questions about this and other matters, such as staffing, based on their findings.
- They make sure that suitable procedures are followed for reviewing the headteacher's performance and when decisions are taken about staff pay rises.
- Governors make sure that the school's systems for safeguarding meet current 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	124344
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	442577

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	165
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lucy Toyn
Headteacher	Jennifer Hammersley
Date of previous school inspection	24 October 2012
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