

St Catherine's Church of England Primary School

Park Road, Ware, Hertfordshire, SG12 0AW

Inspection dates 22–23 May 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.

- St Catherine's is a well-managed, warm and friendly school. Pupils say that they like their teachers and enjoy coming to school.
- Pupils achieve well. They get off to a good start in the stimulating environment of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils make good progress throughout the school.
- Pupils' language and communication skills develop quickly. They are taught to read well and develop a love of reading.
- Teaching is good and improving. Teachers manage classes well and plan interesting activities building on what pupils already know.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and they feel safe at school. They get along well with each other and are polite to others around the school. They are keen to learn and attentive in lessons.
- School leaders know the strengths and areas for development in their school. The clear plans for improvement focus on improving teaching and the progress pupils make.
- The broad, balanced range of subjects is interesting and engaging, effectively promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Governors support the school well and ensure that new initiatives help to speed up pupils' progress.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils do not make as much progress in mathematics as they do in reading and writing.
- Teachers' marking is not always helping pupils to improve and their questioning sometimes does not make pupils think hard enough to extend their learning.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 20 lessons or parts of lessons, including nine which were observed jointly with the headteacher or a member of the senior leadership team. They also looked at pupils' written work in English, mathematics and other subjects.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors, the headteacher and other school leaders. An inspector spoke to a representative of the local authority by telephone.
- Inspectors spoke formally to two groups of pupils, and informally with other pupils in lessons and around the school. An inspector listened to other pupils reading, talked to them about their reading habits and looked at their reading records.
- Several of the school's documents were examined. These included: the school's own evaluation of its performance and its development plan; the school's information about pupils' progress, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs; evidence about the quality of teaching; and records relating to behaviour, safeguarding and attendance.
- Inspectors took account of 95 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), two letters received from parents and the views expressed by parents as they arrived to pick up their children.

Inspection team

James McVeigh, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Victoria Turner

Additional Inspector

John Ubsdell

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Catherine's is an average-sized primary school. There are two classes in the Reception and Year 3, one class in every other year group and an additional mixed class of Year 1 and 2 pupils. The number of pupils on roll is rising.
- At the time of the inspection, the school was undergoing major rebuilding work.
- Most pupils come from a White British background.
- A higher proportion of pupils than average move into and out of the school other than at the usual starting and leaving points. These pupils mostly are of Key Stage 2 age.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (extra government funding given to schools for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or in local authority care) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is similar to the national average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by making sure all teachers:
 - ensure that pupils understand how to improve, for instance, by improving the guidance given in written feedback in all subjects
 - ask questions that will probe pupils' understanding further and extend their learning.
- Raise pupils' achievement in mathematics by providing tasks that make them think hard in applying their mathematical skills.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children begin school with a typical level of development for their age. They settle quickly into the well organised Early Years Foundation Stage where they learn to get along with their classmates and develop independence and confidence. They make good progress throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage. A slightly larger proportion than the national average reached a good level of development in 2013 and current progress information indicates this proportion is on track to be even higher this year.
- Children's communication and language skills develop well because adults model language effectively, extend pupils' vocabulary and provide plenty of opportunities for 'talk.' Phonics (the sounds letters make) is taught well. Pupils develop good skills in pronouncing and spelling unknown words. In the phonics screening checks, pupils perform better than the national average.
- Pupils continue to make good progress in Key Stage 1 in all subjects and sometimes, outstanding progress. They reach standards above the national average in mathematics, writing and reading, although they do not do quite as well in mathematics as they do in reading and writing.
- Attainment average by the end of Year 6 is variable due in part to the number of new pupils who join part way through Key Stage 2 and the relatively small size of the Year 6 cohorts, which can make percentages misleading. However, from their individual starting points, pupils' progress and achievement are good.
- In 2013, pupils in Year 6 did less well in mathematics. School performance information shows a small underperformance by very few pupils had a disproportionately large effect on overall results. There is no evidence currently of any underperformance but progress in mathematics sometimes slows when tasks are too repetitive or do not make them think hard to apply their skills.
- School information on current progress in year groups and pupils' written work in books show that they are making rapid progress in English and mathematics. Pupils in Year 6 are on track to reach standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are above 2013 national averages.
- Pupils quickly learn to read. They read regularly to an adult at home and at school and are effectively encouraged to read widely and often. They enjoy reading and do so with enthusiasm and interest. Pupil's writing skills also develop quickly. They have good opportunities to write for extended periods and to redraft written pieces. Recent work has focused successfully on improving pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar, which had not been quite at the standard of their imaginative writing. Pupils take pride in their work: handwriting is neat and legible.
- Pupils have a good knowledge of basic number facts and know how to carry out simple mathematical operations. They have many opportunities to practise these in repetitive exercises, but have fewer chances to extend their understanding by applying these skills in novel and real-life problems.
- The most-able pupils are making good progress, including through well planned and targeted activities in class and advanced 'master classes' in mathematics from the local secondary school.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress across the

school. Teachers plan activities that meet their individual needs well. Extra support outside the classroom is effective, timely and well organised. The school makes good use of external specialists, such as speech and language therapists, and a 'learning plan' with specific targets for progression is put in place for each pupil.

- Pupil premium funding is used well to provide effective support for eligible pupils, for example through subsidising educational trips and arranging extra academic support. This ensures that progress through the school for these pupils matches their classmates. There were too few pupils in this group in Year 6 in 2013 to compare their attainment with the rest of their class without potentially identifying them.

The quality of teaching is good

- In the well organised Early Years Foundation Stage, teachers provide stimulating experiences in a bright well-resourced space. They plan interesting activities that children enjoy, building on their previous learning. For example, Nursery children were thoroughly engaged predicting which toys would float or sink and testing their predictions. Adults build up comprehensive 'learning journeys,' including photographic evidence and parents' contributions to learning at home, showing what children can do.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and the quality of their work. They manage their classes well and usually plan activities that successfully engage pupils and match their ability. For example, some pupils in Year 4 mathematics were engrossed in working out the volume of liquid in measuring cylinders, while more-able pupils were learning how to convert different units of capacity. Pupils' progress was assessed accurately and the work was pitched at the right level for all.
- Teachers and teaching assistants often question pupils skilfully to test and promote further understanding. For example, Year 3 pupils were challenged to demonstrate and explain how they calculate perimeters of given shapes which improved their confidence in using mathematical terms and consolidated their understanding of perimeters. However, sometimes questioning does not probe pupils' understanding or extend learning well enough.
- Teachers explain clearly what they expect pupils to do, often linking it to earlier experiences. Year 1 pupils made outstanding progress when writing a description of a recent visit to the Natural History Museum. Teaching assistants are deployed well and generally provide good support for identified pupils, encouraging them to work out things for themselves, but helping them where necessary.
- Pupils' written work is marked regularly and usually in detail. Sometimes, teachers provide helpful advice in English and mathematics on how to improve or a further question to test or extend understanding. However, this quality of marking is not consistent across other subjects and all years. Pupils act on teachers' advice, when it is given, although occasionally their responses are not marked.
- Pupils know the level of difficulty they are working at and, with their teachers' help, record targets for improvement in the front of their English and mathematics books. This gives greater responsibility to pupils for their own learning. They check off the steps in improvement and are motivated to try harder.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They behave well in lessons and around the school. At play times, pupils get along with each other well always having someone to play with or talk to. They are polite and courteous to others, including visitors.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. They say they like their teachers and that their lessons are fun and interesting. Pupils are keen to take on extra responsibilities. For example, play leaders and sports ambassadors help organise play time and physical education activities and Year 6 'buddies' look after Reception children at the start of the year.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good in all years. They settle to their work quickly and are eager to learn. Most pupils are attentive in class and work sensibly either when alone or in small groups. Sometimes a few pupils become restless and do not work as hard as they could.
- Most written exercises in books are completed well. Pupils know that they need to behave well to make good progress and follow the school rules. The few incidents of misbehaviour are fully recorded and resolved quickly.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. The site is secure and current building work is effectively separated from staff and pupils. Play times are well supervised and all staff are trained in safeguarding. Pupils say they feel safe and that staff always listen to them if they have any concerns.
- Pupils learn how to stay healthy and safe. They know how to eat healthily and that regular exercise is important. Pupils enjoy the regular exercise, including competitive sport, they participate in at school.
- Pupils know about bullying and its different forms. They say that incidents of bullying are rare and teachers sort them out quickly.
- The school works to promote pupils' regular attendance. Absences are followed up promptly and the local authority is quickly involved when necessary. Attendance was below average in 2013 but is improving and is currently above the national average.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and governors share a clear vision for the school encapsulated in 'ACE' – achieving, caring, enjoying. There is a strong drive to continually improve teaching and pupils' progress, including during the extensive building work.
- The school is a warm and welcoming place. It is well managed and runs smoothly each day. School leaders know its strengths and areas for improvement and are implementing well focused plans. The high numbers of pupils who join the school during Key Stage 2 are integrated quickly and successfully.
- School leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and clear plans to move it to outstanding. They check its quality regularly, by observing lesson, planning and pupils' work, and set teachers challenging targets to improve pupils' progress and their own teaching practice. Suitable training opportunities are available for teachers and teaching assistants, both within and outside school.

- Subject leaders are involved in checking how effectively their subjects are taught. Pupils' progress is checked frequently and there are regular meetings to review that progress and plan the next steps for pupils who are in danger of falling behind.
- The school has received good support from the local authority, including an objective view of its work, and training.
- The school offers a good range of subjects with a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, promoting high standards of behaviour and enthusiasm for learning. There are well planned opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, for example, assemblies and visitors from a range of faiths. There are strong links with the local parish church. Information communication technology and an extensive range of clubs and visits enrich pupils' experiences even further.
- Physical education has a high profile in school. The primary school sport funding is used well to promote pupils' enjoyment and participation in regular physical activity. More pupils are now involved in a wider range of sports both in and out of school, successfully developing their physical wellbeing and sharpening their understanding of the need to live a healthy lifestyle.
- The school is committed to equality of opportunity for its staff and pupils. For example, staff are well supported in their work through training opportunities and pupils premium funding is used well to help eligible pupils to achieve well.
- The school runs a popular breakfast club, where pupils from all years can socialise, engage in a wide range of activities and enjoy healthy food to set them up for the rest of the day.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is well structured and checks the work of the school frequently. Governors know the school well through regular updates from the headteacher and their own focused visits. They have a good range of relevant skills and take advantage of further training from the local authority.
 - Governors support the school well and hold the school leaders to account for the impact of their actions on pupils' progress. They set challenging targets for the headteacher and oversee the process of setting targets for others.
 - Governors ensure prudent management of the school's finances and have planned spending on the new building wisely. They make sure pay awards are warranted and the pupil premium funding is used to the benefit of eligible pupils.
 - Governors make sure the school meets all safeguarding 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	117410
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	443927

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	271
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robert Wilson
Headteacher	Hazel Wing
Date of previous school inspection	27 April 2010
Telephone number	01920 462653
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