

St Mary's Voluntary Controlled Church of England Junior School

Heath Drive, Ware, SG12 0RL

Inspection dates 5–6 June 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 Mary's is a friendly and welcoming school. Pupils say they like their teachers and enjoy lessons. They attend regularly.
- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. By the time they leave school in Year 6, they reach standards that are above the national average.
- The school is managed well and runs smoothly day-to-day. School leaders regularly check the quality of teaching and learning to make sure pupils make good progress.
- The governing body is well-informed about the school's work. Governors provide good support and hold the school to account well.
- Teaching is good and continues to improve. Teachers manage their classes well. They plan activities that interest and engage pupils.
- Pupils behave well. They work together harmoniously, showing respect and concern for one another. They say they feel safe and secure at school.
- The broad range of subjects offered by the school appeals to pupils and is effective in promoting their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils do not make as much progress in writing as they do in reading and mathematics. Spelling and the presentation of their work are not always good enough.
- Teachers do not always give pupils clear written advice about how to improve their work.
- Teachers do not always take enough account of what pupils already know when planning so that some pupils, including the most and least able, do not make as much progress as they could.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 15 lessons or parts of lessons, including three which were observed jointly with the headteacher. They also looked at pupils' written work in English, mathematics and other subjects.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and six other governors, the headteacher and other school leaders and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke formally to two groups of pupils, and informally with other pupils in lessons and around the school. An inspector listened to 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, including the progress of 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 49 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), one telephone call from a parent and the views expressed by parents as they arrived to pick up their children.
- Inspectors analysed 19 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

James McVeigh, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Margaret Dutton

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mary's is slightly smaller than an average-sized primary school. There are two classes in each of the four year groups, Years 3 to 6.
- Almost all pupils come from a White British background.
- 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 below the national average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also 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?

- Raise pupils' achievement in writing by encouraging pupils to improve their presentation, spelling and handwriting.
- Improve teaching by making sure that all teachers:
 - ensure that pupils understand how to improve their work by providing them with clear guidance in written feedback in all subjects
 - plan activities and tasks that will build on what pupils already know, especially the most- and least-able pupils.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Year 6 pupils typically reach standards above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils in the current Year 6 are on track to attain above-average standards.
- Pupils in all year groups usually make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, in 2013 the progress made by Year 6 pupils dipped, particularly in mathematics. The school's information about pupils' performance and their written work indicate that pupils are making stronger progress this year.
- Pupil premium funding is used well to provide effective support for eligible pupils. The few eligible pupils in Year 6 in 2013 made better progress than their classmates in reading and mathematics and similar progress in writing. The attainment gaps in reading, writing and mathematics between this group of pupils and others in the school have been narrowing. In 2013, pupils benefitting from the fund were around two terms behind in writing and mathematics and half a term behind in reading. The attainment gaps within the current cohort have closed.
- The impact of additional support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, such as one-to-one teaching and the use of outside experts, has been good. In most years and subjects, these pupils are making similar or better progress than their classmates.
- The school ensures higher-ability pupils generally make good progress all round by checking how well they are doing regularly and providing challenging activities. For example, a secondary school teacher plans problem-solving sessions in mathematics for them each week.
- Pupils have a good understanding of basic number facts and simple calculations. They are effectively encouraged to practise their skills regularly. For example, they use software programmes for mathematics, both at school and at home, which they enjoy and use competently.
- Pupils read often, making good use of the fiction and non-fiction libraries, where they can record which books they borrow electronically and build up a reading record. They know how to draft and re-edit their work before writing well-crafted extended pieces. Many examples of pupils' written work are displayed and celebrated around the school. However, progress in writing is not as good as in reading as pupils' weaknesses in spelling, handwriting and presentation are not picked up quickly enough.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is improving and most is good. Teachers have established good relationships with pupils and manage classes well. They plan activities that engage pupils' interest, for example, devising tasks that are linked to their recent experiences. Year 4 pupils, for example, made good progress explaining the advice they would give to a character who was facing a dilemma they had previously seen explored in a video.
- Teachers often use skilful questioning to make pupils think harder or give fuller explanations for their answers, which extends their understanding. The teacher's questions in an English lesson prompted Year 6 pupils to reflect deeply on the characters in a story and the underlying purpose of the writer.

- Suitably trained teaching assistants are usually deployed effectively to support identified pupils well. Classrooms are well organised and bright displays of information and examples of pupils' work are used well to assist pupils in their learning. Pupils' ready access to books that are set aside in 'special areas' in each classroom helps maintain the high profile of reading in the school.
- Pupils' work is generally checked regularly by teachers. Pupils are given good opportunities to check their own work and compare it with that of their classmates and do so accurately and sensitively. Teachers usually add encouraging comments but their written marking does not always contain enough clear advice to show pupils how to improve or include harder questions to prompt pupils' understanding to new insights.
- Teachers do not always take enough account of pupils' prior knowledge in their planning. Sometimes, the most-able pupils find the activities too easy and the least able find them too difficult to start without extra help.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They say they like their teachers, find lessons interesting and get on well with each other. Governors, staff and parents agree that pupils behave well.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning. In lessons, pupils are usually fully engaged with their work, attentive and keen to do their best. They work together sensibly in pairs or small groups and regularly share ideas and evaluate one another's work. Occasionally, when work is too hard or too easy, a few pupils begin to lose interest and are more easily distracted.
- In the playground or around the school, pupils are polite and courteous. When they meet visitors they greet them pleasantly and talk confidently about what they are doing. During playtimes, pupils always have someone to play with. Play monitors eagerly sort out the play equipment and keep an eye out for any disagreements among pupils to make sure everyone is happy.
- Adults organise active group games at play times in the 'Change for Life' programme for pupils who are more reluctant to take part in traditional sports. This strengthens pupils' social skills and effectively raises their level of physical activity.
- There are few incidents of misbehaviour. These are fully recorded, including actions taken by the school, and resolved promptly. Pupils have learned about the different forms of bullying and say that bullying is rare. They know they should tell their teachers if they suspect bullying and are confident that adults would quickly deal with anything that worried them.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. The school grounds are well fenced and visitors are promptly and appropriately vetted. Health and safety issues, such as risk assessments for out of school visits, are handled well. Playtimes are well supervised and all staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding.
- For their age, pupils have a good understanding of how to stay healthy and safe, for example, when selecting their meals, working with electricity or crossing the road. Most pupils enjoy the wide range of sports available at school, including swimming in their own heated outdoor pool.
- Absences are followed up promptly. Pupils' attendance has been sustained above the national average for several years.

The leadership and management are good

- The leadership team, fully supported by the governing body, focuses closely and effectively on continually improving teaching and pupils' achievement. The slight dip in pupils' progress last year has been reversed.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Well-focused improvement plans, including ambitious but realistic targets, are in place. Costings and timescales are appropriate and persons to be held accountable for each target have been identified.
- School leaders check the quality of teaching regularly and systematically using a wide range of evidence, including lesson observations, teachers' planning and pupils' work. The work of teaching assistants is checked in a similar manner. All teachers are set meaningful targets to improve pupils' progress.
- Teachers are given good opportunities to improve their own professional development, both in school and externally. The school makes good use of local authority training, for example, for the induction of new governors, and to support governors in setting targets for the headteacher.
- The friendly but purposeful atmosphere of the school is maintained by all staff. Teachers meet with school leaders regularly to check the latest information about pupils' achievement so that extra support can be put in place promptly for any pupils who look as though they are not doing well enough.
- Subject leaders have good opportunities to extend their expertise and undertake the responsibilities they have for managing the way their subjects are taught. They provide guidance and support to teachers to help them improve their subject-specific skills.
- The school provides a broad range of subjects with good opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Opportunities to use information communication technology abound and modern foreign languages, sport, art and music are prominent. Further enrichment comes from a wide range of visits and visitors, for example, visits to museums, botanic gardens and the local church. There is a wide range of clubs which are well-attended.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through subjects, such as religious education, and assemblies. Pupils learn about different cultures and faiths. For example, they have experienced such things as Indian folk art and dancing and learned about Islam and Christianity.
- The primary school sports funding is used effectively. There is now a greater range of sports available in school and teachers' coaching expertise in activities like dance and gymnastics has improved. The school has introduced more competitive games within school in addition to inter-school ones. All pupils are involved in sporting activities with the consequent benefits for their health and fitness.
- Equality of opportunity is promoted well. The school ensures every opportunity is open to all pupils. Pupil premium funding is used effectively to enhance the life experiences of eligible pupils, such as through subsidising trips, and the opportunities they have to make rapid progress, for example, by providing extra study support.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors have a good range of relevant skills and have undertaken appropriate training to help them improve the effectiveness of their work. The governing body both supports and challenges the school well. Governors have a good grasp of school performance information and ask probing questions of school leaders.
- Governors are well informed about the school's activities and the impact they have on pupils' progress. They receive regular, comprehensive reports from the head teacher about standards in the school and make their own frequent and focused visits to check on progress. They make sure that the school's finances are used prudently, for example, that pay rises for teachers are warranted and tied to helping pupils to improve.
- They ensure 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	117409
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	443963

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	227
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nicci Smith
Headteacher	Andy Cosslett
Date of previous school inspection	07 July 2010
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