

# St Peter's School

Cottonmill Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL1 1HL

**Inspection dates** 2–3 July 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
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 in reading, writing and mathematics are above average and higher in English than in mathematics. Most pupils make more than the usual amount of progress from their individual starting points.
- Pupils in receipt of the additional government funding known as pupil premium make very good progress.
- Teaching over time is usually good across a range of subjects and some is outstanding.
- Pupils' conduct in lessons and outside at play is good. They are polite, well-mannered and respectful toward adults and each other. They have good attitudes to learning and know how to keep themselves safe.
- The governing body provides strong leadership with the right balance of support and challenge for key leaders. Governors have managed a difficult year with some complex issues to settle with gravitas and professionalism. They have acted swiftly and decisively to resolve difficulties in the best interests of the pupils, staff, parents and carers.
- The newly appointed headteacher has quickly won the confidence of staff, parents and carers. She has a clear vision of the necessary improvements that are required to restore the school to its former outstanding status.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is proficient and structured but it does not offer pupils enough scope to use their initiative, think for themselves, investigate, express opinions and challenge their own and others' views.
- The quality of teachers' marking and pupils' responses to it is variable across the school, particularly in mathematics.
- Subject leaders make regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning. They do not always reflect on their findings and follow through with well-judged actions to secure improvement. The best practice, evident in some subjects, is not shared widely across the school.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching and learning over time. This included 22 observations of parts of lessons (some seen together with the headteacher) taught by class teachers, teaching assistants or specialist teachers. They looked in depth at pupils' written work in exercise books, examples of work on display and the school's latest information about teaching and pupils' achievement.
- A number of pupils in Years 1 and 2 read to inspectors and talked to them about their books.
- Meetings were held with pupils, parents and carers, key leaders, a representative from the local authority and members of the governing body. Inspectors spoke to the deputy headteacher, who was away on a residential visit with her class, twice on the telephone. The before- and after-school clubs and an assembly were seen.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents including information about pupils' attendance and behaviour, plans for future improvement, self-evaluation and minutes of meetings held by the governing body. Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils and arrangements for disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language were examined.
- The views of the 85 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, together with five letters written to the inspectors were taken into account, and 20 responses to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Linda Killman, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Peter Lacey-Hastings

Additional Inspector

Denise Bonnette-Anderson

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from a range of minority ethnic heritages is above average as is the proportion who speaks English as an additional language.
- The school receives additional funding from the government for a few pupils. This funding known as pupil premium is for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, those who are looked after by the local authority and other groups.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs with a statement or who are supported at school action plus is below the national average. The percentage supported at school action is above average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment by the end of Year 6.
- Before- and after-school care is hosted on the premises and managed by the governing body. A private provider offers afternoon care for children in the Nursery. This provision is registered with Ofsted and subject to a separate inspection.
- The previous headteacher left in January 2014. The deputy headteacher stepped up as acting headteacher until the newly appointed headteacher arrived in June, four weeks before this inspection.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Progress more of the teaching into the outstanding range, by:
  - planning activities that enable pupils to take the initiative, investigate and demonstrate originality, imagination and creativity in their work
  - develop teachers' use of questioning to open up opportunities for pupils to discuss, express opinions and challenge their own and others' views
  - ensuring that all teachers' marking, especially in mathematics, reflects the best examples seen and pupils consistently act on the advice they are given.
- Strengthen the leadership of those responsible for specific subjects by:
  - ensuring that weaknesses identified through monitoring activities are followed up with actions for improvement and checks at key review points
  - sharing the best practice widely across the school.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start in the nursery with skills that are mostly above those usually expected for their age. They make good progress to the end of Reception. When they move into Year 1 the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is significantly higher than the national average especially in their early reading and writing skills.
- Standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics slipped into the broadly average range in 2012 in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. This dip has been rectified and standards have risen for two consecutive years in all subjects. They are above average.
- From the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards pupils quickly develop proficient skills in reading and writing. Pupils are able to break words down into smaller chunks and blend sounds together if they do not recognise them instantly. They use their knowledge to build new words that they have not tried using before in their writing.
- The proportions of pupils making good progress between Year 2 and Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics compare favourably with national figures. In 2013 progress results were in the top 20% of similar schools in reading and writing and the top 40% of schools in mathematics. This year, progress data in all subjects show even better progress with results exceeding national averages by a wide margin.
- There is no significant difference in the progress made by groups of pupils who are potentially more at risk of underachievement. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs have made good progress this year from their individual starting points in reading and writing and at least expected progress in mathematics.
- Most pupils who are from minority ethnic heritages and those who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as others.
- School data confirm that the school uses the pupil premium funding effectively to narrow the gap between eligible pupils' achievement and that of others. In 2012 the gap was wide with eligible pupils at least four terms behind other pupils in attainment. This narrowed to less than three terms in 2013 and it has closed further this school year because these pupils have, overall, made more progress from their starting points than others.
- The brightest pupils achieve well in English and mathematics. In 2013 the most able pupils in Year 6 left the school with attainment at least one term ahead of similar pupils nationally. Nonetheless, some of the written work seen in subjects other than English and mathematics does not always reflect these high standards. For example, in science, use of worksheets for written explanations limits the depth of response in reporting scientific findings that these pupils are capable of.
- Standards in music are above those usually seen in primary schools. A significantly high proportion of pupils including boys and girls, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and those for whom the pupil premium provides support, benefit musically from regular participation in a wide range of musical activities such as choir, orchestra and recorder playing. They perform with confidence in concerts and assemblies.
- The government's primary sports funding has been used suitably to develop teachers' skills in raising pupils' performance in physical education. Specialist coaches have also been employed to

add to the wide range of lunch time and after-school clubs that promote physical activity. This has increased boys' and girls' participation and enjoyment in a wide range of sporting activities including some competitive sporting events.

### **The quality of teaching is good**

- Teaching over time is invariably good with its impact showing strongly in pupils' above average attainment and good progress. The school's records of teaching show that the very large majority is frequently good and sometimes outstanding.
- Weaknesses in the teaching of phonics and writing in Nursery and Reception were identified in a local authority external review last October. The Early Years Foundation Stage team have dealt with these with considerable success given that reading and writing are now strong aspects of children's learning. Provision to promote children's creativity especially in making art is not as strong; there are not enough opportunities for children to experiment and explore to develop their unique, original and imaginative ideas.
- Teachers' assessment of pupils' learning is thorough, regular and accurate. Progress is tracked rigorously ensuring that if any pupil's progress stalls the school intervenes quickly to adjust the level of support or challenge appropriately. This is why all groups of pupils make good progress over time.
- Teachers know their pupils well and use this advantageously to plan work that responds to their interests as well as meeting their needs. Good use is made of visits to places of interest, visitors and local studies to extend pupils' experiences and thirst for knowledge.
- Sometimes teachers do not open up discussion through their questioning well enough to allow pupils to think critically, or to support and challenge each other's views. Similarly, some activities and follow-up written work are quite narrow and prescriptive. As a consequence, the outcomes tend to be similar with little scope for these capable pupils to show originality, imagination and creativity in their written work.
- Inspectors saw some very good examples of teachers' marking in some English books where pupils were given clear direction in how to improve their work. In turn, the pupils responded to the feedback correcting their mistakes and showing that they had understood. In other year groups the quality of feedback was less effective by comparison especially in mathematics.
- Teaching promotes pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. The wild area in the school grounds is used to help pupils to appreciate wildlife and develop a sense of responsibility for the environment. Their spiritual development is enhanced through participation in music, art studies and events in the abbey. They learn about life in other parts of the United Kingdom such as Scotland and faraway countries such as Brazil.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Before school, after school, in lessons and at play pupils treat the adults, each other and visitors with respect and courtesy. Almost all parents and carers who expressed a view agree that the school makes sure its pupils are well behaved.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Almost all parents and carers who expressed a view agree that their children feel safe at school. Pupils are knowledgeable about e-safety understanding the underlying reasons for passwords and awareness of the potential

dangers in using the internet. Pupils are not so aware of how to keep safe in the sun.

- Pupils' conduct, whoever is teaching them, is usually good. They listen well and follow instructions sensibly. What prevents their learning behaviour from being outstanding is their lack of confidence to speak up when it is appropriate to do so or show initiative. For example, in one lesson where most pupils could not see the work on the whiteboard, not one of them politely drew this to the teacher's attention.
- Pupils are knowledgeable about different religions and they embrace diversity. They told inspectors that they have never heard racist remarks. The school's records show that racist or bullying incidents are extremely rare. Exceptional cases are treated very seriously and followed up rigorously with pupils and their parents and carers.
- Attendance is consistently above average and the school has had no cause to exclude any pupils.

### **The leadership and management are good**

- The new headteacher has acted very quickly to restore confidence in staff, parents and carers after an unusually turbulent period. Her high visibility around the school and willingness to meet and greet parents and carers to share their concerns is overwhelmingly appreciated. She is perceptive and in a matter of weeks has a good grasp of the school's strengths and where improvements can be made.
- The deputy headteacher provided stability in the school's leadership by stepping up as acting headteacher for a few months. While taking on numerous additional responsibilities she ensured that the achievement of pupils in her Year 6 class did not suffer unduly as shown in the school's data.
- All of the respondents to the staff questionnaire agreed that they are proud to work at the school and many commented on how well staff have pulled together during the year. They are overwhelmingly appreciative of the strong team ethos at St Peter's and the children that 'are a delight to share the day with'. They are positive in spirit and looking forward with strong desire to improve.
- Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is effective. The team have made improvements in provision that have made a positive difference to children's learning.
- The inclusion coordinator is responsible for overseeing extra help and support for all of the groups at greatest risk of underachievement. All of the potentially vulnerable pupils have made good progress on her watch. She astutely develops the support around each individual pupil's needs.
- Leadership of subjects is secure. It is more effective in some subjects such as English, than others. Subject leaders are checking the quality of curriculum planning, marking and the work in pupils' books but their findings are not always followed up with sufficient rigour for example, by sharing the best practice, to secure improvement.
- The local authority has provided useful and extensive support for the school through a period of change. Governors have been particularly well supported by the Human Resources team and the governor training programme. The school improvement adviser has ensured that the acting headteacher received good support through regular visits. A review of teaching and learning in

October helped the school to make adjustments and move forward. Specialist support for the Early Years Foundation Stage has resulted in improvements in children's learning.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is effective. It has managed difficult and sensitive personnel issues with professionalism. Governors show clarity in decision-making and resourcefulness in moving things forward briskly for example, in appointing a new headteacher within a tight timescale. They sensibly and aptly draw upon the local authority's support if needs be. The governing body demonstrates that it is reflective and learns from previous experiences. Meetings are well organised and essentially focus on pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. Governors know the school well through regular visits to the school. Minutes of meetings show a good level of challenge in discussions about the school's work. Equally governors support the headteacher in making the necessary changes to raise standards through high quality teaching. Governors have been involved in decisions about how the pupil premium funding is spent and expect to see return for the funding in terms of eligible pupils' improved achievement. They know how to link pay awards to pupils' achievement and how the school appraises the performance of staff. Finances are managed well and 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117140
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	443618

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	263
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Michael Sarrington
<b>Headteacher</b>	Gillie Young
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 September 2008
<b>Telephone number</b>	01727 853075
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